

From Jesus to his First Followers: Continuity and Discontinuity

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From Jesus to his First Followers: Continuity and Discontinuity

Anthropological and Historical Perspectives

By

Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce



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Introduction¹

The transition from Jesus to the first groups of his followers is at the center of interest of this book. After Jesus' death those who followed him were confronted with a number of new situations and new perspectives. It is hardly surprising that a process of deep transformation began, which was characterized by both continuity and discontinuity.²

With the course of years, the groups of Jesus' followers inevitably differentiated as they looked for concrete solutions to emerging difficulties. The diffusion of early groups of followers took place in a multireligious context (including Jewish environments). This brought about a variety of effects. It became clear that Jesus had left no instructions about the future internal organization of his movement and no answers to relevant theological questions that the followers gradually had to face.

The essays collected in this volume have in common the attention to Jesus' and his followers' style of life and to the social forms that they adopted in order to integrate into society and justify their aims and activities. In particular, this book highlights the social dynamics triggered by the way of life that Jesus' groups practiced. Historical documentation and socio-cultural investigation are here combined to call attention to the influence of the style of life and the social interchanges of Jesus and his followers on the surrounding society. These social interrelations appear somehow historically more important than theological conceptions.³ This means that we start from the conviction that the real meaning and impact of ideas can be understood only if we grasp the link that connects notions and theories to the kind of life that Jesus chose.

This methodological option is the reason that led us some years ago to write *Encounters With Jesus. The Man in His Place and Time*,⁴ entirely dedicated to Jesus' concrete practices of life. Knowing such practices is the precondition for understanding Jesus' message. In that book, we wanted to stress that Jesus had abandoned his family group, work, and home, that he lived moving constantly

1 We are indebted to editors and publishers for allowing us to publish revised and updated versions of previous articles. At the beginning of each chapter we give the bibliographical indication of the first publication. Chapters 7 and 8 have never been published before.

2 See our book on the death of Jesus (Destro – Pesce 2014a).

3 This book is the result of the collaboration between a cultural anthropologist (Adriana Destro) and a historian and exegete of early Christian writings (Mauro Pesce). It is intended to spread the dialogue between different disciplinary fields.

4 Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2011.

from place to place, asking for hospitality for himself and his followers to private households. He entered many domestic environments and was exposed to welcome but also to refusal. This means that Jesus was rooted in ordinary life of people. He always looked for a direct face-to-face relationship and unmediated contact. In his itinerancy he remained far from the cities and chose the villages as the setting of his activities.

Jesus largely practiced commensality including all individuals, without distinction. He shared food without privileges and balanced exchanges and considered this sharing as the highest example of encounter between human beings. In his view, it was condision of essential resources that made people part of the same design or project. Individuals were required to live together not on the basis of a pure theological conception but because of an active daily participation to a common praxis.

In Part One of the book we highlight two characteristics of Jesus' relation with the society of his time: interstitiality⁵ and conflictual attitude. The social form that Jesus chose to aggregate his followers was discipleship. A group of disciples can be considered a voluntary association that dialectically confronted with other basic forms of aggregation, especially those of family and household, but also with major institutions such as synagogues and the Temple of Jerusalem. The social organization created by Jesus does not tend to set up a group detached and opposed to other social bodies. Jesus wants to be present within private and public spaces. He meets people in the houses, in the streets, in the places where individuals work. He proposes an alternative lifestyle within the existing social spaces. He does not create an alternative religious space to the already present social aggregates and/or organizations. In this sense, his activity is powerful but interstitial in the sense that Jesus does not seek to overthrow institutional structures and does not try to install himself permanently in private and family areas.

The initial chapter deals with the relation between the social form of the discipleship of Jesus and the configuration of the households. Belonging to the group of disciples often involves a conflict with the members of the household. Jesus demands that his closest followers abandon house, work, and family. The social logic of the movement is incompatible with that of the private households, self-centered and basically concentrated on their livelihood and growth. The passage of Luke 12:52–53 (// Matthew 10:34–36) is the emblematic

5 Following M. Douglas, individuals can be interstitial "from the perspective of one internal sub-system to which they do not belong, but in which they must operate" (Douglas, 1996, 103). Jesus assumes, for example, an interstitial position when he is present within a household, without assuming a domestic function and without enjoining permanent hospitality in it.

representation of the conflict in which a member of the house who decides to follow Jesus is involved. S/he has to fight against the rest of the household.

This chapter also clarifies the way in which the interstitial presence of Jesus in the households takes place and influences their lives. It is true that Jesus and his disciples abandon their homes, but it is also true that wherever they go they ask to live in the homes of others, which offer a space for their teaching and convivial encounters. When Jesus is present, the houses are converted into places of inclusion. The interstitial presence in the domestic areas allows Jesus to propose the transformation of what he considered the basis of the society of his time (private environments and households). This presence is intelligible only if we keep in mind that the contrast between the logic of voluntary association of disciples and that of households brings about specific social dynamics. This contrast sets in motion vast sectors of the society and motivates people towards new objectives.

In Chapter Two, Jesus is regarded as a person who faces the society of his time with a critical and conflictual attitude. He undertakes a struggle whose outcome can only be the complete annihilation of the enemy. The enemy is represented by those who are opposing what Jesus believes to be God's will. With this people there can be no compromise. The alternative is simply victory or defeat. The ultimate root of this conflictual attitude was Jesus' acute perception of what was inconsistent with the divine will. The sentence "you cannot obey God and mammon" is the emblem of Jesus' denunciation of any behavior that is incompatible with the will of God. This condemnation of anything that can prevent radical obedience to God brings Jesus to fight a series of practices and beliefs that his opponents perceived as consistent with the traditional religion. The conflicts in which Jesus is involved are therefore not effect of his alleged opposition to Judaism, as Christian anti-Jewish theology anachronistically thought for centuries. They come from his perception of the discordance of some practices with an absolute orientation to God.

Jesus' attitude towards the sacrifices and towards some observances of ritual purity (Chapter Three) must be interpreted in a similar way. Jesus does not deny the value of the sacrificial cult, nor the rules of Biblical Levitical purity, but shifts the emphasis on behavior. It is the mutual forgiveness between people rather than the ritual of *Yom ha-Kippurim* that obtains the cancellation of sins. The rules of purification lose their importance in front of the basic need for justice and reconciliation. In this question, Jesus is in continuity but somehow also discontinuity with many Jewish religious groups and with John the Baptist (to whom he had been very close).

As the title of the book indicates, our analysis is also interested in the evolutions and changes that took place after Jesus' death (Chapter Four). In the Gospel of John, the contrast between Jesus' discipleship and households

become less relevant and acute. The reason is that at the end of the century the logic of private households has again taken over the logic of Jesus practice of discipleship. At this time, itinerancy is no longer the prevailing form of life of Jesus' followers. In John, the demands of Jesus to the disciples to leave home, work, family and possessions disappear. Jesus' followers are now organized as groups settled and integrated in homes. The domestic *ethos* takes over on Jesus' request of radical renounces and/or profound social transformations.

In Part Two of the book, we present another aspect about the primacy of the practice of life of Jesus and his early followers. In Chapter Five, we take into account the fact that many religious forms were widespread in numerous cultural areas of the ancient world. The search for the heavenly journey, for example, was for many centuries largely present in Middle-Eastern, Jewish, Greek and Roman-Hellenistic worlds. We believe that the heavenly journey was primarily a religious practice and not a literary motif or an abstract theological *topos*. It was one of the common religious forms or practices in antiquity (like prayer or sacrifice). It is therefore a mistake to interpret the episode described by Paul in 2 Cor 12:1–4 only in the light of a supposed Jewish (apocalyptic) framework. The fact that this religious phenomenon was so widespread (despite its various and divergent interpretations) lets us understand what kind of experience was implied in it. Our hypothesis is that the presumed experience of the heavenly journey could have its source in a certain type of psychic-somatic attitude that can lead to a kind of detachment or opposition between two parts of the self.

We maintain in Chapter Six that the continuity of behavior of the disciples with Jesus practice of life may be observed also in some forms of contact with the supernatural (exorcisms, prayers, visions, healings, etc). Apparently the disciples had learned these practices from Jesus himself. In essence, we suggest that the continuity or discontinuity of the followers with Jesus should not be primarily examined on the basis of theological conceptions, but of religious experiences and performances. This leads to a different understanding of the plurality of interpretations of the figure of Jesus and his message that took place immediately after his death. What the disciples have in common with Jesus is a set of practical behaviors with which they try to reach the divine world. It is therefore understandable that different practices could lead to divergent supernatural revelations, to dissimilar positions and consequences.

We basically assume that the multiplication of forms of contact with the supernatural that characterizes the first Jesus' followers after his death should not be explained as a novelty. They were not mainly due to the influence of Hellenistic models. On the contrary, these practices originated from Jesus' way of life. A certain number of gospel texts actually induce to think that Jesus'

followers learned from their master such forms of contact with the supernatural world. This means that it is wise to interpret these practices not as episodic but rather as typical of the post-Jesus movement.

In Parte Three, the book concentrates on the diversity of Jesus' first groups of followers and on the cultural-religious discontinuity between them and Jesus.

In Chapter Seven we seek to reconstruct a map of the groups of followers in the Land of Israel and in its surroundings, immediately after Jesus' death. In order to locate such groups, we try to detect the textual traces of the possible 'territorial origin' of the information about Jesus. The regions where we note a concentration of such places are different from Gospel to Gospel. The fact that each Gospel refers to a specific area or series of areas—where Jesus would have pronounced certain words or done certain actions—cannot be accidental. Evidently, this circumstance is historically relevant. It leads to think that each gospel was based on local sources and that each of them contained distinctive local perspectives and aims.

As we have recently argued (Destro – Pesce 2014b), in these places there were independent streams of transmission about Jesus that developed without reciprocal connections and contained only partial information about him. These two facts, scarce reciprocal knowledge and partiality, can explain the dishomogeneity that exists between the Gospels.

In Chapter Eight, we give an example of the differences of information that exist between groups with distinctive local basis. We try to show how the lines of transmission about Jesus have led to dissimilar representations of the events; in particular we examine the accounts of Jesus' passion in Mark and John.

The confrontation of the descriptions of these authors suggests that behind the texts there were independent, sometimes divergent or contrasting lines of transmission because groups of Jesus' followers were situated in specific spaces and were in possession of specific information.

An analysis of the early processes of memorization leads to recognize the existence of (a) a differentiation among groups that took place in the initial moment and (b) the development of a second phase, of a successive formation of a collective memory inside each group. This means that, from the beginning the various and divergent lines of spreading were expression of dissimilar groups and that they developed in dishomogeneous ways.

A conclusion that can be drawn is that the authors produced their Gospels because they wanted to correct previous memories and their transmissions. The Gospels are written, at least in part, as acts of polemical confrontation, as critical instruments against other fluxes of transmissions. What seems to emerge is a diffuse conflictual situation in early Christianity, a conscious

confrontation of groups and authors about the past. The existence of struggle between groups makes rather inappropriate the use of theories of memory to explain Gospels' narratives and their dissimilarities. This means that divergent information is created and disseminated by acts of transmission and by the memorization processes themselves.

Chapter Nine is dedicated to the first two chapters of the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus announced the imminent kingdom of God and addressed only the Jews of the Land of Israel. Matthew, on the contrary, presupposes the existence of groups of Jesus' followers who live in Syria and wants to justify the legitimacy of proclaiming the message of Jesus also to non-Jews. Jesus' followers in Syria are minority and threatened groups. However, they retain the aspiration for a universal supremacy. The kingdom of God, in fact, also if not imminent, will certainly come. To persuade non-Jews to accept the rule of the King of the Jews, Matthew makes use of a genealogy in which all nations and territories are to be submitted to the king of the Jews descended from Abraham. The legitimacy of the royal claim of the Messiah Jesus is demonstrated by non-Judaic criteria of revelation, like the appearance of the star marking the rise of the kingdom of Israel. In substance, the first two chapters of Matthew's gospel, read in the context of the whole work, show one of the ways in which some groups interpreted and somehow transformed the way of life and the message of Jesus.

In Chapter Ten we discuss how Jesus' message and practice of life are represented in the Acts of the Apostles. The book of Acts witnesses the condition of the followers in a period roughly contemporaneous to that of Matthew, but in the political and social context of the cities of Asia Minor and Greece. The Acts show a very active strategy of integration in the Roman Empire. Here the "mise en histoire" of the new religious movement and its claim to address all the peoples (and not only the Jews) takes place through the construction of a world history. Within this universal vision of history the proclamation of the salvation announced by Jesus' followers is the final and decisive event.

In Chapter Eleven we affirm that Johannism, at least in the form it takes in the Gospel of John, seems to express groups of followers heavily influenced by the ways of life of the Hellenistic cities. The author of this gospel is very attentive to the reality of domestic slavery strongly present in urban environments. In John, the symbolic system of this type of slavery becomes an essential point of reference to explain the center of the religious experience. The aspiration to freedom of the slave is taken as a metaphor for spiritual orientation and progress. The attention to domestic slavery is an example of how the message of Jesus is transformed when it is transplanted within the life of the households of the Hellenistic cities. This somehow confirms the image

we have presented years ago of the Johannine groups (Destro – Pesce 2000). In our view, the religious proposal of Jesus is interpreted by John within a process of initiation heavily influenced by Hellenistic models.

What is essential to keep in mind is that the followers of Jesus in the last quarter of the first century had to cope with problems that Jesus had not foreseen and on which had not given instructions. These problems include the fact that the kingdom of God he expected did not come and did not seem to arrive, and also the fact that Jesus had not addressed his message to non-Jews and therefore had not explained how they should be converted and what should be the relations between followers of Jesus, Jews and non-Jews. Actually, Jesus was not worried about the organization of future groups of his followers after his death, because he was certain that the advent of the kingdom of God was imminent.

In Part Three, the examination of the groups of Jesus' followers highlights different ways of transformation of Jesus' message and way of life.

It is our belief that Christianity was born only when the groups of Jesus were separated from the Jews. However, this separation did not give rise to a new religion until the followers of Jesus and the Jews constitute distinct social groups with divergent theological conceptions and specific religious practices.

In the last chapter of the book, we face a particular aspect of this question. To say that the birth of Christianity depends on a change of the social fabric and backgrounds of Jesus' followers means that our analysis does not primarily examine religious conceptions. We take into account a particular practice, the occupation of burial spaces within multicultural situations. One feature of the localization of the dead must be emphasized. The burial system is historically important and culturally essential because it deals with human bodies and their images. A burial system opens a large glimpse on the existence of the groups concerned, on their needs and resources. It helps to understand how the practical life requires to be investigated for its powerful documentary significance.

We chiefly concentrate on the examination of epigraphical materials. These witnesses are precious clues of the memorable partition and transformation of the Jewish and Christian groups of early times. They show that the differentiation of Jesus' followers from the Jews in the burial locations took place in the big cities (e.g. Rome) not before the beginning of the second century. Conversely, in the villages, the coexistence in the cemeterial space will continue much longer (e.g. in the villages of the Golan). The burial space provides a profound insight of the multifaceted processes experienced by many groups of Jesus' followers.

We want to thank friends and colleagues who read previous versions of this volume. We are particularly grateful to Paul Anderson and Brill Publisher for accepting our book in the Biblical Interpretation Series and for all their suggestions and comments. We would like to thank Liesbeth Hugenholtz for her patience and extremely kind collaboration.⁶

6 The original English translations of each chapter were modified by us. We are responsible for the final English version. Sylvia Lincoln and James Bowley have revised our translations at some stages of our work. We want to thank them for their highly valuable help. New Testament translations are generally taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

PART 1

Jesus' Strategy: Interstitiality and Conflict



The Interstitial Movement of Jesus and the *oikos*

1 Household and Polis¹

It is widely known that the focus on households implies attention to kinship ties, usually intended as ‘family’,² but also to a complex system of existence concerning property, work, and different kinds of powers that binds and supports kin and non-kin alike.

In first-century Galilee, as described in the gospels, the household (*oikos*)³ as a group of persons living together (Moxnes 1997b, 23) is in the foreground. The householder, a preeminent social figure we encounter in the gospels, is the head of the domestic aggregate or group. S/he is responsible for familial roles and choices at private and public level.⁴

1 We present in this chapter a revised version of “Fathers and Householders in Jesus’ Movement: the Perspective of the Gospel of Luke”, *Biblical Interpretation* 11 (2003) 211–238, published in a monographic issue edited by Halvor Moxnes.

2 By family we mean a culturally constructed and socially recognized descent group. We cannot discuss the historical variety of familial types. We merely note that the elementary or nuclear family corresponds to the reproductive nucleus (of two generations) of any kinship system. The household often includes more than two generations. Its reproduction does not exclusively depend on familial links; it is based on different bonds (of voluntary, legal, affectional nature, etc.) (see Fortes 1971, 8). “Neither in Greek nor in Latin is there a term for our word ‘family’ in the meaning of ‘husband and wife with one or more children’ (i.e. ‘the nuclear family’). In Greek literature we find extensive discussions of *oikonomia*, that is, the management of household (Finley 1973, 17–21)” (Moxnes 1997, 20). The Latin word *familia* has a different meaning from the contemporary word “family”. In Columella (1, v, 7) “*res familiaris*” means the *villa* as a property. Gardner and Wiedemann 1991, 3–4 give four different meanings for *familia*: property; “a certain body of persons, defined either by a strict legal bond [...] or in a general sense of people joined by a looser relationship of kinship”; slaves; “several persons who all descend by blood from a single remembered source.” *Familia*, therefore, has the meaning of “household” and not of “family.”

3 It is here impossible to cite the vast American and European bibliography on families and households: see Goody 1983, 1990; Kertzer 1984; Gardner and Wiedemann 1991; J.H. Elliott 1991; Dixon 1992; A.P. Cohen 1993; Saller 1994; Moxnes 1997a,b; Osiek – Balch 1997; Guijarro 1997, 1998; Pomeroy 1997; Destro 1998; van Henten – Brenner (eds.) 2000; Nathan 2000.

4 He may be a father who has generated offspring, but may also not be a father. On the issues raised in this chapter, see also Destro – Pesce 2011a, 102–127.

It should be emphasized that in the Hellenistic world the life and function of the household are to be seen as a sort of counterpart of the social and political organization centered on the *polis*. A connection between *oikos* and *polis* evidently exists at the level of the patronage system.⁵ In this connection, what A. Wallace-Hadrill wrote in 1990 seems significant and still helpful: “patronage was central to the Roman cultural experience, in a way that was foreign to the Greek cultural experience. It represented a vital part of conscious Roman ideology, of their own image of how their world both was and ought to be” (1990b, 65). The problem is to verify in the various areas and historical periods how this ideal was translated into practice, and to what extent. It is essential to ascertain (a) if the relationship functioned to the benefit of both patron and client or if it was just a power system in favor of the upper classes, and (b) if such system remained unaltered and constant over the centuries. We agree with Wallace-Hadrill that patronage as a political system “served one fundamental function, to provide a connection between the center of power and the peripheries that the center sought to control. From the point of view of the society, patronage represented a flexible method of integration and simultaneously of social control. [...] From the point of view of the individual patron, the ability to persuade others of his power to secure access to benefits was the basis of social credibility” (1990b, 85).

Luke’s redaction tends to place Jesus’ actions and words within the *oikos-polis* relation (cf. also E.W. Stegemann and W. Stegemann 1998, 447).⁶ However, Jesus always avoided cities (Moxnes 2003, 155; Destro – Pesce 2011, 5–10) and did not reason in terms of the *oikos-polis* opposition. He did not place the *oikos* in connection to the city but to a different social, political and religious reality: the Land of Israel or the Kingdom of God. As we shall see, this suggests a mistrust on Jesus’ part in the patron-client relationship (mainly centered on the subordination of villages to cities). In any case, the attention of Jesus to the

5 For a definition of patronage we remember Saller’s discussion (1990a): “First, it involves the reciprocal exchange of goods and services. Secondly, to distinguish it from a commercial transaction in the marketplace, the relationship must be a personal one of some duration. Thirdly, it must be asymmetrical, in the sense that the two parties are of unequal status and offer different kinds of goods and services in the exchange—a quality which sets patronage off from friendship between equals” (Saller 1990a, 49). In his reply to his critics, Saller points out that “In the imperial age, the *patronus-cliens* relationship had no ‘technical sense’ and no formal standing in law. Nothing precluded Roman from having more than one *patronus*. Linguistic usage reveals that the words *patronus* and *cliens* were applied to a wide range of bonds between men of unequal status, including junior and senior aristocrats” (1990a, 60).

6 As R.L. Rohrbaugh (1991, 126) has shown, Luke tends to use the term *polis* for places and settlements that were certainly not cities (Capernaum, Chorazin, Nain, Nazareth).

function of the *oikos* leads him to redefine the function of the householders. Therefore, it is the function of householders in Jesus' movement as described by Luke, which is the main theme of our investigation.

2 Discipleship and Household

The group⁷ of Jesus' followers was basically organized according to a social pattern: discipleship. Discipleship can be considered as a social organization or form consisting of a group of individuals gathering around a master. Its purpose is the attainment of a common aim. This means that disciples follow their leader in order to learn doctrines and a way of life, but also to reach the fulfillment of specific needs that are achievable thanks to the master's initiative and strategic ability. Discipleship is therefore an articulated social aggregation created through adherence of individuals to a group. Such individuals cooperate in a stable way. Often they cohabit, move together and share resources. In this sense, it could be said that discipleship falls into the broad category of voluntary association (see Kloppenborg – Wilson 1996).⁸ The household, by contrast, is not a voluntary organization and has a different social position and logic. It is clear that the aims of the two social formations do not coincide and, in certain cases, may even conflict.⁹ The interaction between household and voluntary association is hence necessarily dialectical. It is based on a relation that may be of opposition or of collaboration. It also implies discontinuities and contradictions, since external and internal roles are performed by those that contemporarily belong to both social forms.

We shall now rapidly list a series of well-known factors that are basic to our analysis. In the gospel narratives about Jesus' disciples, the individual householders (and also the fathers of the disciples) are generally not clearly outlined.

7 In this book we avoid the term "community". For a critique of the concept of community applied to early Jesus' groups see Destro – Pesce 2014b, 81–83; Destro – Pesce 2014a, 33, 206, 215–21; Stowers 2011; Urciuoli 2013a e 2013b; on the concept of church cf. Trebilco 2011c.

8 Malina (2001, 214–217) argues against the concept of 'voluntary' as used in the U.S. and Northern Europe cultures.

9 Van Henten has stressed that "by looking for the process of establishing social identity in Early Christianity contexts we may have to take into consideration theories that do not take kinship relations as point of departure". Van Henten emphasizes the importance, beside the family, of "three other models": "a holy community", "a group of special philosophers (*airesis*)", "the concept of the Christians as the unique people" (2000, 188–190). Starting from the relation between household and voluntary association, we take a different position. See also Sachot (1998).

However, the fact that the ordinary active function of the householders (and of the fathers) is not mentioned, does not automatically witness their absence.¹⁰ Their presence and/or role could be implicit. I. Kottsieper (2000) has shown that in Ancient Israel the structure of the family led to a certain lack of function of the householders (in particular of the fathers) in connection with certain issues. For example, the brothers – not the fathers – had a decisive role towards the sisters.¹¹ This means that an enquiry into the absence of fathers has to take into account the various kinds of first-century family structures (see Guijarro 1995, 1997, 1998), as well as the relationships between linear and/or collateral relatives.

Within Jesus' movement, we first of all distinguish between itinerant disciples, who follow Jesus in his displacements, and sedentary disciples, who do not follow him. The latter remain within their own households and attend their usual activities (Theissen 1979; Pesce 1982). Jesus instructs the itinerants to stay as guests in the houses of the villages they pass through (Luke 10:5–7 // Matthew 10:12–13). We may presuppose that the heads of the households had a crucial role in deciding whether to welcome the members of Jesus' movement into their homes. It is the householder who accepts guests in the name of domestic group. For this reason we must investigate whether the gospels provide evidence of the functions of the householder in the houses where the

10 In an article published in *Biblical Interpretation* (Destro – Pesce, 1995a, see Chapter Four of this book), we underlined the *absence* of disciples' fathers in Jesus' movement. We argued that this absence could explain the greater freedom of action of sons, mothers and sisters within the movement. It is therefore quite plausible that the absence of fathers was not accidental. To understand this absence of the disciples' fathers from Jesus' movement, we emphasized that in the Synoptic Gospels Jesus asks his disciples to give up their families as well as their occupations and goods. We also noted that the requirement of leaving the parents equally regards mothers. However, some of them (for example Jesus' mother, the mother of Zebedee's sons and the mother of Alphaeus' son, cf. Mark 15:40) are in some way present. Since 1995, we have developed a more coherent point of view, which has enabled us to improve our evaluation of the function of the fathers in Jesus' movement. In this chapter, we limit our investigation to the description of Jesus movement in Luke's Gospel.

11 Kottsieper (2000) takes into consideration the *Song of Songs* and the stories about the kidnapping of Tamar, the destiny of Dinah (2 Sam 13–14; Gen 34) and, in addition, non-biblical material. From his observations, we should perhaps conclude that in this type of household the father is *not an absent* father, but oriented towards other objectives mainly external to the family. In our opinion, this means that within the family the relations between collateral relatives, brother and sister, are of decisive importance. We must nevertheless be heedful of the fact that the *Song of Songs* is a piece of poetry, not a historical description.

itinerants are sheltered. It is also necessary to understand how the mechanism of hospitality in the culture of the first-century Land of Israel works.

The presence of Jesus' movement within a domestic setting does not automatically imply its identification with a typical household's way of life. It is true that a large house may contain spaces destined to public dealings and others to private life. Jesus however does not make use of the public space of a house as a client of the householder, nor he makes use of the house as a friend or as a relative. We shall see various cases in which Jesus makes use of houses in non-domestic ways. Jesus, for example, teaches in the houses while the women are attending their normal household services. In this case some household members who are not closely linked to Jesus can listen to his teaching when he is present in their houses (as in the case of Martha, who does housework while Jesus teaches, Luke 10:38).

Jesus' request to follow him is not addressed to an entire domestic group, but to single people. He speaks to individuals. This often creates conflicts between the single individual and the household that is going to lose one of its members. However, it is to the household that Jesus and his movement turn when they require hospitality. We must therefore bear in mind this substantial difference between Jesus' itinerant followers and the householders that receive them.¹² It is only one person or few individuals¹³ that follow Jesus, while it is an entire household that gives hospitality to him and his movement.

One specific problem concerns the individual's freedom of choice in the context of the household. This freedom may be expressed by the personal and autonomous decision to pass from one group to the other. For example, this

12 Sandnes 1997, 152–153 maintains that “the starting point of the churches was normally the conversion of the *paterfamilias*, who embraced the Christian faith together with his whole household.” He admits that “conversion did not always take place in connection with households. Sometimes only a husband converted, sometimes only a wife.” But Sandnes concludes that “the social matrix of early Christianity was *oikos* and kinship. From the very beginning the movement was marked by kinship logic and precepts” (153). We cannot accept this conclusion, since he seems to overlook the dialectic between household and discipleship. See also N.H. Taylor 1995.

13 A certain form of independence in relation to the family was perhaps implicit and structural in the decision to follow a master. Different forms of relationship between master and disciple could nevertheless correspond to a greater or lesser autonomy, independence or conflict with the family; see, for example, the extreme cases of the Qumranites and Pythagoreans (cf. Iamblichus, *Vita pythagorica* xvii, 71–75). For Rabbinical schools, see the case of Eliezer ben Hyrcanos, whose father was opposed to his son's desire to study the Torah at the school of Jochanan ben Zakkai, because he wanted him to work on the family farm (ARN A, 6; see Pesce 1982, 383 n. 108).

occurs when Jesus' disciples pass from John the Baptizer to Jesus, or when Flavius Josephus adheres successively to various movements (*Vita* 2, 10–12). Such freedom of choice was probably a characteristic of the upper classes (Rohrbaugh 2002).¹⁴ Jesus' request shows however that it may have existed in other social strata as well.

Discipleship tends to respond to particular social objectives and necessities (Destro – Pesce 2000, 112–118). It precisely relates to or is influenced by the dynamics of social institutions, such as household and patronage. Both social formations tend to respond to similar needs but also to conflicting or fairly dishomogeneous aims. Households, in particular, have strategies and tools to satisfy the essential aims of everyday life. The interconnection between discipleship, household and patronage is crucially important. What we must take into particular account is the interstitial nature of Jesus' movement.¹⁵ In our vision, an interstitial movement is located inside other social entities and actively relates to or interacts with them, but is not part of them. Its nature and its effects emerge in a subtle and pervasive usage of different models of conduct. This often takes place in informal areas of houses and through informal domestic behavior. An interstitial movement does not create social forms alternative to those already existing, nor does it seek to overturn institutional mechanisms. It has rather an impact on the basic social relationships of life and on the sphere of intimate bonds (chiefly domestic or private). This means that interstitiality creates, at the level of practical life, new styles and links inside and between households.¹⁶

14 It should be noted how important the idea of free choice (*proairesis*) is for Josephus in religious matters. For him, the *proairesis* is a decision that is not taken under the influence of others. It is the moral decision of the individual, the manifestation of his own personal freedom (cf., for example, *Ant.* 1,9; 1,254; IV,293; IX, 148; *Vita* 27,5; 369,2; *Contra Apionem* 1,214; 2,160; 2,289). The context in which these ideals of respect for the individual's decision in religious matters develop, are, first, the pluralism of the organized religious groups that characterize first-century Judaism (see, for example, Josephus, *Vita* 10: "I would have been able to choose (*airêsesthai*) the best if I had tried them all") and, second, the situation of cultural co-existence characterizing the life of first-century Jews both in the Land of Israel and in the Diaspora.

15 The term 'interstitial group' designates a body that lacks a well-defined social position accepted by institutions. Interstitiality is generally temporary. An interstitial existence does not entail permanent settlement in assigned spaces, nor does it intend to exercise functions that are recognized by society (in this respect see also note 5 of the Introduction).

16 See Destro – Pesce 2011a, 172.

3 Generational Differences. Absence or Presence of Fathers among the Itinerant Disciples

In Luke's Gospel there are two kinds of texts that help us to understand the functions performed by those who become Jesus' followers. Some texts speak of individuals who decide to join Jesus. Others describe the conditions required or the consequences of following him. In the first kind of texts the individual followers can be divided up into three categories: (a) those invited by Jesus: Simon (Luke 4:38–39; 5:10–11); James and John (Luke 5:10a–11); Levi (Luke 5:27–29); a simple man (Luke 9:59–60); an *archôn* (Luke 18:18–23); (b) those who ask Jesus if they can follow him: an anonymous man (Luke 9:57–58); another anonymous man (Luke 9:61–62); iii) those who accompany Jesus, of whom we know nothing concerning how they became followers, such as the women in Luke 8:2–3. The second type of texts clarifies what is needed for following Jesus, or what happens to those who live with him: Luke 12:33 (selling possessions and giving alms); Luke 12:52–53 (three people against two in an *oikos* of five people); Luke 14:26 (hatred of household members); Luke 14:33 (selling all property); Luke 18:28–30 (“we who have abandoned everything”).

We try now to find the position of Jesus' followers moving from the perspective of their place within the *oikos*. We set out to see whether they belonged to the category of fathers and/or were exercising the systemic function of householder. The first question is: to what generation do Jesus' followers, or those whom Jesus calls, belong? In our view, it is possible to speak of “generation” in relation to Jesus' followers, only in presence of some basic conditions: we can speak of generation a) if evidence exists for identifying parents and/or offspring, b) if the available information can lead to ascertain a person's age, c) if kinship terminology implies a generational difference (e.g. if the text speaks of, or mentions “mother-in-law” or “daughter-in-law”, etc.).

In certain cases, our attention may focus on situations where three generations are present: the father, his offspring (male or female), and the children of the latter. Within the household, we can distinguish, therefore, between the generation of older people, the generation of adults, and that of the young, the adolescents or children (*neaniskoi, paides*). For clarity, we speak of fathers referring to the generation of older people.

A preliminary answer to the generation question is that none of Jesus' followers belong to the older generation, as defined above. Nor do any of them belong to the level of *neaniskoi* or *paides*. Jesus' disciples seem to belong to the so-called intermediate generation of adults. Simon, for instance, is present on the scene, together with a mother-in-law probably belonging to the previous generation (even if she does not belong to Simon's kinship group)

(Luke 4:38–39). In Luke 5:10a–11,¹⁷ James and John, sons of Zebedee, belong to the intermediate generation with respect to their own father. This situation is clearer in Mark 1:19–20 than in Luke. Mark 1:20 says that their father was with them. In Mark, the father, Zebedee, is not member of the group of Jesus. He does not follow him and is left behind. In this case, it is evident that a member of the older generation does not react positively. He is not in accordance and does not aggregate with younger followers.

In Luke 9:59–60 (// Matthew 8:21–22), the link between generations is in the forefront. A father, who was head of the household, has just died. He was the leading figure or authority in the house. His son has a strong function in it, because he represents the intermediate generation and is tied to its important duties and tasks. He is very much in the foreground and, indeed, is about to succeed to the position of household leadership.

There is then a series of texts in which it is unclear whether the disciples belong to the old generation or the intermediate one. The latter case seems more plausible. In Luke 8:1–3, for example, we find a group of women followers of Jesus who accompany him on his journeying. They are well-off women who support Jesus' group with their own property. Such women are not defined on the basis of criteria relating to generation. The fact that they can dispose of their own goods freely, places them either in the intermediate generation or that of older people. Of Joanna, Luke specifies only that she was the wife of Herod's administrator. We cannot exclude that she was a rather old woman, with adult offspring.

The same situation arises in other circumstances. In Luke 5:27 (// Mark 2:13–15 // Matthew 9:9–10), Levi becomes a disciple of Jesus. He is a householder and gives a dinner for Jesus "in his house" (Luke 5:29). His ascendants, descendants or collaterals are not named, nor even his wife (we cannot exclude he was married). He might belong to the first, or the intermediate generation, even though the second hypothesis seems more plausible. A similar case is that of the *archôn* of Luke 18:18–23 (Mark 10:17–22 // Matthew 19:16–22), invited by Jesus to follow him: his case is useful for elucidating the social composition and identity of Jesus' movement. The fact that he can dispose of his own goods places him in the category of householders. Unfortunately no information about his generation is given. He, too, might belong either to the first generation, or to the intermediate level of the domestic nucleus.

In the case of the disciples in Luke 9:57–58 and 61–62, we do not have certain information as to the generational status of persons presented in the text.

17 On this passage, cf. Guijarro 1998, 176–178. Luke underlines the need to abandon "everything".

Luke 7:11–17 (the son of the widow of Nain) is an illuminating example. It seems that neither the mother nor the son are disciples of Jesus. After Jesus wakes him up, the young man does not show any desire to follow him, nor does Jesus ask him to perhaps because he is very young (*neaniskos*). This may help to clarify that the followers are adults, and autonomous persons. From this exclusion of a member of the younger generation comes a confirmation that the intermediate generation is the focus of attention in the gospel accounts.

The fact that Jesus chooses his closest followers among members of the middle generation means that he wants to utilize the most active and reliable forces in his society. They are considered indispensable because they give Jesus their collaboration in the period of their greater energy and social dynamism.

4 Inside the Household

A broad picture of a household, in which some individuals decide to follow Jesus, is given in Luke 12:52–53 (// Matthew 10:34–36):

from now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.¹⁸

Within the household, the conflict follows generation and gender lines. Male and female are clearly distinct. Only one of the three conflicts is between males, while two occur between females (12:53). The conflict involves a first ideal unit of father-son, a second unit of mother-daughter, and a third unit of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The implicit social model is that of a domestic nucleus of two generations: that of the parents and that of the married son and daughter. This is the most schematic outline of the domestic model found in Luke's Gospel and it is a sufficiently detailed pattern to become a point of reference for the classification of kinship relations within the household.

At this point, it is important to note that the division (*diamerismos*) does not seem an accidental result, but the inevitable effect that Jesus says he has come to bring. Jesus considers the contrast between family members positively. In

¹⁸ On this passage, cf. Guijarro 1998, 287–288.

doing so, he overturns the biblical subtext of Micah (7:6), where the contrast is negatively evaluated.¹⁹

Luke's Gospel examines five components of the *oikos*: four are linked to each other via conjugal ties and consanguinity (father, mother, son and daughter) and the fifth is an acquired member, the daughter-in-law. It is because of this acquired member that we can say we are dealing with a domestic group based on an extended family. According to the representation of the conflict of three people against two in an *oikos* of five people, one may imagine that the basic point is a model in which the father and the mother, on one side, are opposed to the son, daughter and daughter-in-law, on the other. The mother is the only person with two roles: she is mother and mother-in-law. It is worth noting that the mother and the father never appear as husband and wife, and the son and daughter never are defined as brother and sister. This means that the author selects and exemplifies only the positions he wishes to illuminate. The emphasis of the discourse is apparently concentrated on generations. Links and oppositions are described according to a vertical dimension.

The text of Luke is extremely significant. It condenses a typical situation. It contains the representation of the possible conflict that may arise when a member of the household becomes an itinerant disciple of Jesus. It means that, according to Luke, the disciples leaving the *oikos* may belong to different generations and genders. They may not only be sons, but daughters and even wives (as, in fact, Luke 8:1–3 emphasizes with regard to Joanna, Chuza's wife). In substance, Luke presents a conflict between two generations, not between individuals, because he speaks of three against two, as if the three were allied, but against the two. He does not speak of a conflict of one person against four. Only in this case, each individual member of the household, becoming a

19 Behind the Gospels of Luke, Matthew and Thomas, a 'tradition' probably lies that reworks two parts of a verse in Micah (Mic 7:6): "the son dishonors the father, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house". In the first part of Micah's verse (in the Greek Septuagint translation), a conflict is outlined in the *oikos* among five people corresponding to different roles (son, father, daughter, mother, daughter-in-law, mother-in-law). In the second part of the verse, there is a conflict of the male (*anēr*) with all the males (*andres*) of his *oikos*. It seems to us that this verse is no more than a proverbial background profoundly reworked by Jesus' saying. If Jesus and the later transmitter of this saying referred to this passage of Micah, it is because they found in it an adequate form for their own image of the *oikos*, and against this background they elaborated their own idea. Entirely absent from the Micah passage is the conflict caused by adherence to a voluntary association in which the leader of the association claims to have a higher authority than that of the father.

disciple of Jesus, becomes an enemy or separates himself/herself off from the four. This latter vision is not Luke's, but Matthew's (10:35–36).

It should be noted that in Luke the father is named first, whereas in Matthew it is an *anthrôpos* (both at v. 35 and v. 36) who is named first. The phrase of the final comment of Matthew sums up the whole viewpoint of an individual *anthrôpos*. In Matthew the totality of the members of the household (that he calls *oikiaikoi*) is against one *anthrôpos*. His formulation is very powerful. Matthew seems to gather all the members of the *oikos* against the potential disciple. In the two following verses, "He who loves father or mother more than me [...] who loves son or daughter more than me" (10:37–38), Matthew is pointing out that whoever follows Jesus may be a son or a father. In addition, the fact that this individual is related first to the older generation, and then to the younger one, induces us to believe that also this gospel considers the disciple to belong to the intermediate generation.²⁰

We need to take into account Luke 14:26 (//Matthew 10:37–38) (see Guijarro 1998, 303–305): "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple". This text supposes that the typical follower is a male who has living father and mother, is married with children and has brothers and sisters. Luke supposes an *oikos* similar to that of 12:52, although a little more extended, in the sense that it may contain a greater number of people (brothers and sisters, as well as children). The typical disciple is therefore imagined as a member of the intermediate generation (with parents and children) in a large household. This means that the dynamic force of the household is not represented by the father, but by the intermediate married man. What is worth noting is that Luke implicitly places Jesus' saying in a context of social obligations enforced by *oikos* membership (similar to that described in the parable of the Great Supper, Luke 14:18–20). Luke however does not say: "who does not hate his/her *oikos*" (in other words his/her overall social position). His sentence ("Whoever does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters") seems to imply the rejection of the essential generational line, which links the consanguinity of three generations. It is obviously harder for disciples to detach themselves from relatives than from other members of the *familia* in the Latin sense of the term, i.e. from the *oikos*. The sentence seems to imply (for the member of the voluntary association of Jesus' followers) not just the obligation of a clear

20 See also *Gospel of Thomas* 16, where the conflict in the house is between two against three. Thomas, however, makes explicit only the opposition between son and father concluding that the disciple will be standing alone.

separation from the *oikos*. It brings about also a radical condemnation of the basic kin relations within the *oikos*.

An important clarification comes from Luke 18:28–30 (// Mark 10:28–30; Matthew 19:27–9) (see also, Guijarro 1998, 206–7).

And Peter said, “Look we have left our homes and followed you”. And he said to them, “Truly, I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life” (Luke 18:28–30).

In Luke, the order in which the renunciations are listed (“house, or wife, or brothers, or parents, or children”), suggests that the person who abandons his relatives is a male belonging to the middle generation. He is clearly located between his parents (*goneis*) above him, and his own children (*tekna*) below. Indeed, Luke puts forward a series of alternative cases that delineate the intermediate status of the person that leaves the *oikos*: he who abandons his wife, or his brothers or else parents or children.

We can add that in four cases (Simon, James and John, and Levi), the disciples who separate themselves from their households also have another characteristic. These persons are members of voluntary professional associations: they are fishermen or tax collectors. They are people, in other words, who have already experienced social forms that are different from those governing the household. They participate in associations in order to reach objectives that the household could not obtain (even though fathers, sons, and brothers may enter together into such associations).²¹ Thus, the disciples in question are already predisposed to join an association like Jesus’ discipleship, even though the specific group of Jesus requires a difficult separation from (and also a conflict with) the household.

We may also ask ourselves about the kind of households from which Jesus’ followers come. Levi’s house (Luke 5:27–29) is certainly a big one with slaves, while Simon’s seems to be small or medium-size. Luke 12:52–53, describing the conflict created in a household when some of its members decide to follow Jesus, seems to presuppose a household of limited size. Perhaps this image also underlies Luke 18:28–30, where it does not seem that those who abandoned their house had possessed a very big one.

In conclusion, the Gospels of Luke and Matthew mainly imagine Jesus’ disciples as belonging to the intermediate generation. From this perspective, it is

21 On the fishermen associations see Hanson 1997, Troche 2015.

evident that in Jesus' movement the fathers of the older generation tend to be irrelevant because they are absent.

5 Heads of Household and Followers

A further question is whether the disciples of Jesus (or those who could follow him) are heads of households.

In Luke the householders seem to be: Simon, James and John, Levi, the unnamed man (*tis*) who wishes to follow Jesus wherever he goes (9:57–58), the man who asks for permission to go and bury his father (9:59–60), another man who asks to take his leave from the people in his *oikos* (9:61–62), and the rich *archôn* who does not follow Jesus (18:18–23). In Luke 18:29–30 (“Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, . . .”) the man who leaves his wife or his children could be a householder, but the one who abandons his/her parents or brothers and sisters, is possibly not married and apparently is not a householder. The women of Luke 8:1–3 would not seem to be householders, even though some of them are wealthy owners and, this being the case, might also be householders in their own right.

In Luke 12:33 (a sentence present only in Luke) Jesus orders: “Sell the things that belong to you and give alms”. The sentence in itself does not refer just to the disciples. In Luke's vision, however, the sentence is strictly linked to Jesus' followers (cf. Luke 12:22–40).²² The problem we raise is whether Luke thinks that the disciples who sell their belongings are householders or not. They could be persons who have the power to sell. But one might also think that a son may ask in advance for his property or for his future inheritance (cf. the parable of the prodigal son, Luke 15:11–32).²³

Similarly, another sentence of Jesus is found only in Luke 14:33. In this passage, the total abandonment of property shows that the follower is imagined as a person who has the power to dispose of, or renounce to, “all he has.” He would thus seem to be an owner and a householder.²⁴

22 Moxnes 1988, 66–68 asks what the function of money was. *Luke* in general insists on selling and on money as means of exchange.

23 The parables, as is well known, are not always a sure source for knowing the everyday social praxis or the bases of the social structure and nevertheless offer many insights into it.

24 The insistence of Luke on the necessary separation from one's property raises a problem for the reconstruction of the historical Jesus. Our hypothesis is that, in some way,

Yet the ideal disciple who separates himself from his household in Luke 12:52–53 does not seem to be necessarily a householder, to the extent that he separates from his parents. He seems to leave the household of which his father is head. Equally, the ideal disciple of Luke 14:26 is a member of the intermediate generation, insofar as he has parents and children. Hence, he is not primarily a householder, but a son and a father.

The conclusion is that, according to Luke, the disciples are members of a household guided by a member of the old generation, a father who remains in the household after the son has become a disciple. This element, too, leads us to imagine an absence of fathers of the older generation in Jesus' movement.

A further question is whether from Luke's texts there appears a kind of generational struggle, which could provide the background to the separation of some members of the intermediate generation from their household. In the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32), the eldest son seems to fit happily into the household, in a village "far" from the city (cf. 15:15, *politôn*), run by the father, from whom he will take over in the future. The younger son sees no prospects for himself in this situation and dreams his future in a remote country, in a completely different context. A conflict emerges between the city, seen negatively, and the village, seen positively. For some members of the intermediate generation (in this case, the younger son) the city, perhaps hellenized, exercises an attraction that is implicitly condemned in the parable (indeed his life in the city ends in failure). From this background an image emerges of an opposition between generations, father against son, and, within the same generation, between younger and eldest son. A deep contrast is grafted on to the city/country duality. The conflict seems to be disapproved, since the younger son's choice to abandon his father's way of life ends in his total ruin.²⁵

The parable shows that Luke has a very positive opinion of the father and householder. Perhaps Luke has a less positive opinion of the two sons. The

Jesus had in mind the equality of the Jubilee of Leviticus 25 (Destro – Pesce 1999, 59–72), as indeed he does in Luke 4:17–19 (where Jesus' declarations are clearly inspired by the Jubilee liberation ideal). The Jubilee is a mechanism of collective reorganization, according to which all the members of the people have to come back into the possession of their freedom, if they had been reduced to slavery, and have to come back into possession of their house and land, if they had been forced to give them up because of their debts. On Lev. 25 and its reinterpretation in the Judaism of the first century before the CE, cf. Pesce 1999a.

25 On the conflict between generations in the ancient world, cf. Bertman 1976 and Fuà 1995, 202–206. Many of the articles in the book edited by Bertman show the conflict between generations during the Roman Revolution (134–27 BCE) and at various times in the first century CE. On the weight of generations in early Christianity see Aguirre 2010, 39–41.

choice of the younger son to go to the city is not approved, but the attitude of the eldest son is also judged negatively. His defensive attachment to the household is condemned, because it prevents him from welcoming his brother. The parable aims to put forward a model in which the ordinary or standard household has to accept within itself, unconditionally, also those who fail or have threatened its existence. In Luke, Jesus' ideal envisages a domestic unit that should offer perpetual help even to those who split off from it.

In conclusion, we suggest that Jesus' followers seem to belong to an emerging middle generation, some of them with an experience of participation to voluntary associations linked to their work. It seems plausible that they already lived in conflict with the older generation, because of their mobility, their social and economic initiative.

To be a little more specific, we must say that before joining Jesus most of the followers (married and unmarried, men and women) certainly belonged to the households of their fathers. Some others however were themselves householders, who could freely dispose of their property and have an important function in their own house. The decision to follow Jesus created strong contrasts with the other members of the house. These struggles were due to the fact that the followers interrupted the function they fulfilled before joining the movement of Jesus and this had the effect of changing the profile of their households.

6 Houses that Provide Hospitality to Jesus and His Disciples: A Challenge to Householders

Having first sketched the itinerant disciples, we now consider the texts that speak of the sedentary sympathizers who give hospitality to Jesus' group. First, we take into account the scenes of Luke where Jesus and his movement enter into relation with some households. We also take into account the parables that have a household as background. It is true that some of the parables describe fictional scenarios, nonetheless they offer a cultural backdrop extremely important for the reconstruction of the environment of Jesus' movement.

The texts of Luke that are useful for reconstructing Jesus' relations with the houses are numerous: 5:17 Jesus teaching in a house; 7:1–10 Jesus and the centurion; 8:19 conflict of Jesus with mother and brothers; 8:39 the return of a healed man to his *oikos*; 8:49–56 the head of a synagogue; 9:4 commissioning the Twelve; 9:42 a *neaniskos* is given back to his mother; 9:52–55 a Samaritan village refuses hospitality; 10:5–7, 8–10 the Seventy have to seek hospitality in the houses; 10:34 the *pandocheion*; 10:38–42 Jesus in Martha's house; 11:5 hospitality for a friend at midnight; 11:37 Jesus in the house of a Pharisee; 14:1 Jesus

in the house of a Pharisee; 14:8 places at table; 14:12 teaching on hospitality; 14:15–24 the parable of the banquet; 15:11–32 the parable of the prodigal son; 16:1–8 the dishonest manager; 16:19–31 the rich man and the poor man; 17:7–9 the owner and the slave; 19:2–10 Jesus in the house of Zacchaeus; 24:29–30 hospitality in a house at Emmaus.

From these numerous passages it is clear that Luke's Jesus makes considerable use of the hospitality of householders. Jesus is presented as someone who does not have a house (9:58), but who seeks a place where he can rest, eat and sleep. He uses Simon's house (4:38), Martha's house (10:38), and the house at Emmaus (24:29–30) (the latter episode is relating to the resurrected Jesus). He sends messengers to find lodging for himself (9:52), he travels around preaching and asks to enter in private houses (19:5). In particular, (a) Jesus is sometimes welcomed in houses where a banquet has been prepared especially for him (5:27–29; 11:37–52; 14:1; 24:30), (b) he uses to teach in ordinary houses (5:17; 8:20; perhaps in 10:38 where it cannot be excluded that Jesus teaches not only to Mary but also to an unmentioned public) and presents his teachings in meal settings (11:37–52; likewise 14:5–24, where he teaches after addressing the issue of Sabbath healing; 14:1–3). (c) His healing activity can take place in domestic spaces (5:24; 8:51–56; 14:4). We can conclude that Jesus utilizes houses for a variety of functions.

In some texts Jesus wants to strengthen the bonds within the household. He gives back the only son back to a widow (7:11–17) who in the absence of a husband would probably be without assistance. In 8:32–33 Jesus heals a man who is possessed. The healed man, called *anêr*, asks to follow Jesus (literally “stay with him”). Jesus refuses and replies: “return to your *oikos*” (8:39). This means that the healed will no longer live among the tombs. The opposition tomb/*oikos* metaphorizes the exterior/interior contrast, from the point of view of the household.

Jesus and his movement are depending on the household structure day after day. They have to find somewhere to lodge (since they do not make use of inns). Luke's Jesus programmatically declares that the Twelve have to make use of hospitality in the houses of others. He tells the Twelve: “And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there you go out” (9:4). To enter (*eiserchomai*), to exit (*exerchomai*) are verbs that mark mobility. To stay (*meinô*) means a temporary stop between the two movements. It may indicate a period of time devoted to some kind of activity in the houses.

In 10:1–12 (// Matthew 10:5–16) Luke says that Jesus sends seventy of his disciples (two by two and in various places) to ask to be taken into houses (*oikia*, Luke 10:6.7). The followers are suggested to enter a house and receive essentially “food and drink” and a place to sleep (as the verb “stay” may

indicate). They must not pass from house to house. They are invited to say “peace to this *oikos*”, expressing in this way respect and friendship to the people who live in the *oikia*. Once accepted by the householders, they have to settle down, utilize the resources of the house and take on in some way its codes of behavior.

All considered, Jesus’ movement makes substantial use of the system of the household. This is all the more significant, if it is borne in mind that there were places where people actually could lodge when traveling (e.g. the so-called inn, *pandocheion*, of Luke 10:34 or else the *katalyma* of Luke 2:7). We will see how the *oikos* offers Jesus’ movement the required support for essential needs on a spontaneous basis without reward or balanced restitution. In this manner, Jesus challenges the way in which hospitality was normally practiced.

7 When Jesus and His Movement Enter a Household

In Luke, as in the other gospels, we meet a great variety of houses where hospitality is practiced. This corresponds to recent archeological results on the different types of houses in first-century Palestine (Guijarro 1995, 1997, 1998; Botha 1998). In particular, in Luke we find examples of: (a) the *villa* (as in the case of the proprietor who has an *oikonomos*, 16:1–8; or in the case of the parable of the banquet, 14:15–24); (b) very large houses, such as that of the rich man who does not pay attention to Lazarus (16:19–21); Levi’s house, which can host an important banquet (5:29), and Zacchaeus’s residence (19:2–10); perhaps the houses of the two Pharisees who invite Jesus (11:37; 14:1.7); (c) medium-size houses such as, perhaps, Simon’s, where there probably were no slaves; the modest house of the *oikodespotês* (17:7–9), who probably had only one slave to carry out all the tasks (work in the fields and the serving of meals); (d) small houses, such as Martha’s, where there are no slaves (10:38–42). Luke seems to imagine (e) also a house in an *insula*, as in the case of the person who receives a friend at night (11:5–8).

To sum up: the parables give examples of very large houses,²⁶ while the stories of hospitality concerning Jesus and his disciples are often set in middle-size and small houses. This does not exclude that in some of these stories, we encounter large houses of wealthy people as well (see the case of Levi and Zacchaeus).

26 The parables generally contain exemplary stories and emblematic situations. They express, in part, the conditions of upper classes and not only of subordinate people.

8 The Function of Households in Luke's Narrative

In the time of Jesus, providing hospitality in houses was a widespread and helpful resource. It was rather customary for travelers to find hospitality in private houses along their route, despite the existence of taverns or inns (Luke 2:7; 10:34) (or perhaps also synagogues with inns) (L.I. Levine 1981; L.M. White 1996; Destro – Pesce 2000, 73–74).

In Columella's *Re rustica* (1,v,7), we find indirect confirmation of the importance of such practice. The author suggests that one should not build a *villa* on the road (*in via*). The sense of this suggestion is to avoid easy access to travelers, who come to the *villa* to ask for shelter and support. The traveler is supposed to represent a danger for fields and household property (*infestat rem familiarem*). Information contained in Columella's—that presupposes that the common recourse to lodging along the road was well attested in the first century²⁷—prevents us from giving a strictly religious interpretation to the gospel passages describing the customs of the Jesus' group. The support mechanism for travelers (via hospitality) should be understood as a practice of reciprocal aid rather than as an act of pure generosity. Reciprocity was generally expected. According to the extent that concrete aid was granted, one could hope to receive help and hospitality in return.

With regard to the custom of asking for lodging along the road, the Columella text indicates clearly that two attitudes could be taken: acceptance or rejection. Hospitality was not therefore automatic and guaranteed. The reasons for rejecting hospitality could be many. Luke 9:52–55 clearly shows that the Samaritans do not give hospitality to Jesus and his followers because they are on their way to the Temple of Jerusalem. Luke 9:53 presupposes that providing hospitality to a group of pilgrims is normal if they belong to one's own religious group. Thus, the Samaritans refuse hospitality to non-Samaritans. In Luke 11:5–8, the parable of the man who welcomes a friend into his house at midnight shows that hospitality always has to be offered to friends, in any circumstance. What is common to these texts is that hospitality is undoubtedly refused to those who are considered extraneous, hostile or dissimilar.

There are three points that seem important in the perspective of Luke's Jesus. First, the households must practice hospitality. This duty is implicit in Jesus' command to the Twelve and to the Seventy (9:4; 10:5–7). Jesus himself, as

27 Also the passage in Luke 24:29–30 (the story of Emmaus) represents a scene in which a traveler towards evening needs hospitality in a house where he can eat and sleep. The traveler is invited to stay. He enters as if he were going to stay and lies down with the guests to eat.

we have said, asks for hospitality quite firmly (cf. 19:5). He appears well aware of the difficulty houses may have in providing help and shelter. Nonetheless he orders the disciples to make an emblematic gesture of rejection towards the villages that do not provide them with hospitality (Luke 9:5; 10:10–12).²⁸

Secondly, Luke's Jesus thinks that the householders have to provide hospitality without the aim of obtaining advantage through the exchange. Hospitality is due also to those who have nothing, and who are unable to reciprocate.²⁹ The parable of the banquet (Luke 14:15–24 // Matthew 22:1–14 // Thomas 64) (see Dupont 1978; Rohrbaugh 1991) is very significant from this viewpoint. Luke's version of the parable is certainly much closer than Matthew's to the common literary archetype on which they both depend (Pesce 1978). The invited guests refuse the invitation because it is in contrast with the activities of their own household. The household here appears as a group of persons looking after or defending their own autonomous position, whose members wish primarily to run their own affairs. Their actions are centered on the internal life of the *oikos*: the purchase of fields and/or the marriage duties (in the case of Luke); claims against merchants, the purchase of a home or a farm, a banquet for a friend (in the case of Thomas). The households make their calculations in terms of their material interests and matrimonial affairs. Since many refuse the invitation to the banquet,³⁰ the householder of the parable orders his slave to invite weak and poor people (the crippled, the blind and lame) (14:21). The parable suggests that banquets should be used to provide help for those who are outside the system of exchange and competition. The parable proposes and encourages to accept the ideal of redistribution of goods.³¹

Third, householders have to behave in line with criteria of justice. In 19:1–10 Luke recounts Jesus' meeting with Zacchaeus who was a superintendent of tax-gatherers and therefore very rich (cf. Cimma 1981, 41–98). Jesus says to him:

28 On hospitality in first-century villages, cf. Oakman 1991, 166.

29 Moxnes 1991, 264: "Jesus urges here a break with the system of reciprocities in which a gift is always repaid by the recipient"; J.H. Elliott 1991, 236–238.

30 Rohrbaugh 1991, 140–146 illustrates following patterns of behavior in pre-industrial society underlying the parable: the dual invitation to the meal by the urban élites, the fact that if someone who belonged to the elite did not accept the invitation, all the others did not accept it either, and finally that it was unthinkable that the classes living on the margins of society could be invited by the urban elite and enter into its urban space.

31 Rohrbaugh 1991, 146 believes that "table fellowship within the Christian community is [...] the issue Luke addresses by the parable". By contrast, we look at Luke's parable from the *implicit* perspective of Jesus' social context. We are not interested in dealing with the problem of the internal social composition of Luke's "community". About this, see E.W. Stegemann and W. Stegemann 1998, 511–512.

“I must stay (*meinai*) in your *oikos*” (19:5). Zacchaeus is not invited to leave his house in order to become a follower of Jesus. He is a house-owner who is not requested to abandon his job. He must begin to practice justice: and in fact he will give half his goods to the poor and will compensate the injustices he has committed. To him it is said: “salvation has come to this *oikos*”, by contrast the *archôn* who refuses to sell all his property cannot enter the kingdom of God (18:24). Only itinerant followers, in Luke’s view, are supposed to sell everything, whereas sympathizers may adopt a less radical attitude. This is consistent with the image of a movement that is based, at the same time, on its active members who abandon their household and on householders who guarantee hospitality.

The parable of 16:19–31 (found only in Luke) is in line with the same background, and widens the scenario. It introduces a wealthy man (*plousios*) and a poor fellow (*ptôchos*), Lazarus, who is at the gate of the rich man and who is not invited in. Hospitality does not work here, as it did not work in the parable of the banquet. In this parable a powerful man does not respect the system of taking poor people in and making them feel at home. The hospitality system is not practiced toward the wretched person, who is not in condition to repay and balance the exchange.³²

Within the more general function of hospitality, Luke emphasizes first of all two scenarios: that of domestic services (Martha, Simon’s mother-in-law, the slave who returns from the fields) and that of conviviality.³³ The convivial setting in particular recurs frequently and in a variety of cases. The two scenarios help to explain what Luke’s Jesus thinks of the functioning of the *oikos*. Jesus goes into the houses because they are precisely the place where some of the central problems of his society are evident and pressing. Certain kinds of behavior practiced in the *oikos* seems to represent the social structures which Luke’s Jesus disapproves.

In brief, Luke’s Jesus denounces the mechanism of exchange between householders, which excludes the social classes that are not able to enter into this reciprocal exchange (those who are not house-owners, who have no

32 Here too, as in the parable of the banquet, the opposition is between those who are rich and those who are poor and without a house. The parable says that in order to avoid the punishment of hell it would be enough to observe the Law of Moses and the prophets. It may be deduced that the parable presupposes that egalitarianism among the people of Israel derives from respect for the law.

33 This Gospel pays attention to many issues: the order of places occupied by the guests seen as a symbolic geography of the social hierarchy (14:7–11); the kinds of people invited (14:12–14.15–24); and the obligation to provide food even for unexpected guests (“the friend who arrives at midnight”, 11:5).

property and no resources). According to Luke's Jesus, these social strata should be beneficiaries of support both from (a) the itinerant disciples (who have to sell everything and give alms to the poor) and (b) the sedentary followers who have to open up their houses.

In Luke's Gospel Jesus concentrates his attention on the situation of the poor and marginalized, who are unable to benefit from mechanisms of balanced exchange and social reciprocity. Jesus seems to know perfectly the mechanism of patronage (cf. 7:1–10). He is also aware of the fact that the poor cannot benefit the patron-client system. He seems to live in situations of social crisis similar to those described by A. Wallace-Hadrill,³⁴ in which patronage is weak or does not function.³⁵ As H. Moxnes has rightly emphasized, the rich people in Luke do not wish to behave like patrons, "they are portrayed as unwilling to show such generosity as one should rightly expect" from patrons (Moxnes 1991, 254–257). Jesus commands the itinerants to give their goods away without asking to be repaid. His suggestion to the sedentary followers to use hospitality outside the mechanism of reciprocal exchange eliminates the very basis of patronage (Moxnes 1991, 264).

In other words, we believe that Jesus is not trying to transform the patronage system. It is hardly possible to remove such a powerful practice. He was thinking of an entirely different system of social relations inspired by the model of

34 Wallace-Hadrill lists three cases in which the function of patronage weakens. (a) When the number of the poor in a city grows to a great extent, the poor are "simply too numerous to enter into significant personal relations with the few hundred members of the political elite", or else when debt crises occur that necessarily imply "a crisis of patronage" because "'debt' in a patronage society should form part of the nexus of mutual obligations of patron and client: a debt crisis implies a crisis of patronage" (Wallace-Hadrill, 1990b, 69). The function of patronage also weakens (b) in relation to the distribution of lands and corn, as in the case of the Gracchi in Rome. This "constituted a frontal assault on patronal power, for dependence on the state for alleviation in times of poverty and crisis reduced the necessity of dependence on an individual" (Wallace-Hadrill 1990b, 70), or (c) when the "relationship of dependence and protection" is "made monetary", giving rise to two phenomena: "the rewards of advocacy and the bribery of voters." "The very concept of bribery, as of debt (above), suggests a patronage system in crisis" (Wallace-Hadrill 1990b, 70–71).

35 In the first-century Land of Israel, patronage could have been in a crisis situation for two of these reasons: (a) monetarization and (b) the heavy indebtedness of the poor. The weaker and poorer the lower classes were, the less profitable patronage relations were. People who are too poor or too weak do not become useful clients, and the patrons have insufficient wealth or power in relation to their needs. In this situation, the function of the head of the *oikos* is also weaker, and the social form of discipleship could respond to needs left unresolved by patronage.

the Levitical Jubilee, where slavery and social subordination are eliminated, and equality is established.

We have maintained elsewhere that Jesus' idea of the remission of sins and his attitude towards sacrifices are inspired by the social and religious ideal of the Jubilee (Destro – Pesce 1999a). In Luke, in substance, the religious transformation of the *oikos* that Jesus proposes does not go in the direction of the construction of the *polis*, but in the direction of a regeneration of the entire Israel. His project necessarily entails the welcoming of the poor.³⁶

9 Jesus' Challenge to the Households

It is from the point of view of the households that Luke's Jesus looks at the social life of his time. He does not consider them as inert or neutral, and addresses them with two different challenges. The first concerns, as we have said, the members of the intermediate generation, who depend on the older generation of the fathers (Destro – Pesce 2011a, 110–116). Jesus asks this people to abandon everything and to join him. The second challenge is addressed to the sedentary householders. To them, Jesus asks to open their homes and offer hospitality, without reciprocity and social compensation. This double challenge differentiates the kind of participation of individuals in Jesus' movement and puts all disciples into a close interrelation. Within this process the model of discipleship tends to transform the model of the household.

The gospel passages examined have shown that there is a very strong dialectic between Jesus' movement and households, and that the movement has a peculiar structural relation with households that cannot be ignored or underestimated. A deep and close correlation was operating between the two structural subjects, *oikos* and discipleship. This fact deserves a final consideration.

The basic reason why Luke's Jesus asks the itinerants to break with their households and sell their property is to put them in a condition where they are absolutely deprived of instruments with which to make alliances with households (who provide them with hospitality). If the followers were economically well off or independent owners they would have less opportunity to establish free relations with the households. At the same time, within Luke's vision, the householder has an essential function in Jesus' movement, exactly because

36 In 1988 Moxnes had already recalled the importance of the Leviticus Jubilee as background to Jesus' religious ideals.

he is the head of a stable structure that offers assistance. He is the most precious cooperator of the movement. From another point of view, however, as we have shown, the head of the house is strongly influenced and challenged by the social and religious style of the movement. He accepts the innovative style of Jesus' group and gives new perspectives to crucial aspects of social life.

The Conflict of Jesus with the Society of His Time

1 Anthropological Approaches to Conflict and Identity¹

Societies may be conceived as aggregates of interacting and competing social agents (such as groups, strata, classes, segments, parties). Within this perspective, almost any human action or project, whether occurring in more or less stable societies or in societies undergoing frequent changes, may give rise simultaneously to alliances and conflicts, consensus and dissent, ideological struggles and real wars. This means that social agents that cooperate with some partners are, contemporarily and inevitably, in contrast with other groups or individuals. Moreover, they may be induced to ally, more or less rapidly, with some other parties or aggregations.

It is evident that conflicts should not be merely considered in terms of their supposedly destructive functions, but also in terms of their effects of rectification and remodelling social organization. Conflicts often imply negotiations/agreements among competitors, and bring about or impose several “forms of unity” among different social agents (Simmel 1904, 247). Given its complex characteristics a conflict should never be simply defined as an oppositional² relationship between two or more parties/groups, but rather as a process of change that reshapes societies.

What we want to underline is that conflicts generally reveal situations of social dualism, bipolarization or tendency to splitting. They are particularly influential in mobile social constructions and unstable political environments. A fought confrontation may bring about a sort of redefinition/clarification of a troubled situation, may develop a way of reaching an aggregation, or resolution of divergencies, between struggling groups or different sectors of a society (Simmel 1908, 247–251; 1904, 490–494).³

1 In this chapter we publish a revised edition of a section of the article “Die zentrale Rolle des Konflikts in Verkündigung und Handeln Jesu”, in G. Gelardini – P. Schmid (eds.), *Theoriebildung im christlich-jüdischen Dialog. Kulturwissenschaftliche Reflexionen zur Deutung, Verhältnisbestimmung und Diskussionsfähigkeit von Religionen*, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 2003, 131–149. We would like to thank Doron Mendels for his comments on a first draft of the paper.

2 See also J. Freund 1983, 287–301.

3 “If, however, from these impulses conflict has once broken out, it is in reality the way to remove the dualism and to arrive at some form of unity, even if through annihilation of one of the parties” (Simmel 1904, 490). “That which was negative and dualistic may, after deduction of its destructive action in particular relationships, on the whole, play an entirely

The school of Manchester (in particular Gluckman 1956 and 1965) theorized a close interdependence between contrasts and agreements in every society. The scholars of this group highlighted processes of alternation between states of cohesion and states of conflict. Some French scholars (Balandier 1955) agree on this kind of analysis and place the accent on internal social discontinuities. In broad lines, this approach, known as cohesion/conflict theory, purposely envisages the function of integration carried out by conflictual phenomena. Contrasting confrontations and ideological clashes may lead to a codified solution (for instance statutory innovations, leave of some partners, final division of previous allies) and contemporarily give birth to a more balanced distribution and utilization of forces/resources.

Many kind of economic and political conflicts are not simply symptoms of pathologies, but correspond or respond to symbolic needs and specific structures of meaning. They are not merely anarchic outbursts that upset perspectives and destroy future. They should be considered as social facts—in Mauss' terms—similar to, or at the same level of, other social facts (Laburthe-Tolra and Warnier 1993, 136).

Seen in this light, conflicts appear to arise from the fact that every social organization has multiform aims and is crossed by many critical forces. For instance, societies are involved in the management of scarce, insufficient, or non-homogeneous human and non-human resources. This means that individuals and groups, when participating in the utilization of common resources or in the construction of common projects, have to face complex interdependent tasks implemented in different ways and phases, or bound to stringent local situations. Day after day people must undertake actions or follow choices that can lead either to collaboration or, conversely, to deep hostility. At a certain moment these people may faithfully be linked to somebody (inaugurating a state of cohesion) but they may also divide from some others (opening a state of conflict). Later, however, the same persons may join somebody else for a new type of cohesion that may end in a new disagreement and division. The discontinuous phases of agreement/disagreement or alliance/separation are in general not predictable. However in some structural situations (concerning for instance kin and family, households, political parties etc.) they may be foreseen and managed with more or less success.

positive role" (Simmel 1904, 492). "If accordingly the hostile relationships do not of themselves alone produce a social structure, but only in correlation with unifying energies, so that only by the co-working of the two can the concrete life-unity of the group arise" (Simmel 1904, 494).

2 Conflict and Discontinuity

Conflicts are universal and their widespread influence brings about a variety of consequences. This means that they must be contextualized, seen as part of the perpetual social discontinuity (cf. Sahlin 1985) and taken into account as sources or effects of many types of social formations and cultural visions.

Above all, conflicts are rooted in the broad background of cultural evolutions and in the compensatory strategies of everyday life. They produce many interrelations between past and present, between ancient structures and innovation, between groups and individuals. In general, they play alternative roles as factors of conservation or repudiation, renewal or mutation, and for this reason are differently deciphered.

In this scenario the concept of identity has a relevant meaning. It was often used in the late 20th century as an interdisciplinary instrument to assert the cultural characteristics, potentialities and rights of specific subjects (often minorities or marginal groups).⁴ In this context, conflicts have been considered as essential moments or processes of identity construction. They offer, in a variety of cases, heuristic tools for theoretical explanations of social evolution.

By identity construction, we refer to a complex process through which social groups and/or individuals bring together pre-existing factors and new elements. They amalgamate components, borrowed from the outside relational world, with their own usual system of relations.

The identity is never static or compulsory and does not uniquely depend on the past or on the present. It is built by numerous simultaneous capacities and appartenances (membership to majority or minority groups, belonging to male or female-centered aggregations, access to political resources, to mythological references, etc.). Each personal identity, in the sense we spoke of, is generally acknowledged by one's environment, by insiders and outsiders of the relational web to which the person belongs.

In the religious field, the process of identity construction is essentially the result of the assimilation and re-elaboration of internal—and often external—resources of a group or an individual. Such process is never linear, comprehensive or really conclusive. It is the outcome of the continual multilateral confrontation and selection of new factors or innovative conceptions.

Insofar as these confrontations involve collective groups, the processes of identity construction have to do with strategies of acquisition and integration

4 Amselle 1999, 2001; Remotti 1996, 2010. Barth 1969; A.P. Cohen 1994; Geertz 2000, 175–178; Bauman 1999; Bhabha 1994; Canclini 2001; Eriksen, 2009; See also Destro – Pesce 2012.

of social roles (Goody 2000a). They imply important instruments of communication (such as language, forms of orality, gestures, writing, creation of literary genres) as well as mechanisms of persuasion. It is evident, therefore, that such processes require an adequate set of opinions and information about other groups living in the same social contexts (Goody 2000a, 63–85). This means that the creation of individual and collective forms of identity always requires complex and flexible framing and cultural adaptation.⁵

The construction of identity of a religious group is a process that engages the intellectual and practical resources of individuals adhering to an organic system of beliefs and practices. Such resources, evidently in constant transformation, offer multiple points of reference.

In specific historic situations, the values that animate and characterize individuals and groups are very often asserted in conflictual acts and synthesized in conflictual terms (A.P. Cohen 1974, 32.56–57). When there is no conflict, many distinguishing characteristics may remain latent for long periods. While they remain latent, individuals and groups may easily coexist. In other words, coexistence may be rooted on the fact that often conceptions and perceptions of identities are unspoken, that is they are not explicitly expressed or invoked in defense of specific values.

We noted earlier that identity features are neither permanent nor absolute, precisely because they are the outcome of a process that expresses only some aspects of the identity implicitly existing within a social group (we call it “latent identity”). We believe that the explicit identity is always situational and discontinuous. It is also far more restricted or limited than the latent one. Therefore, an analysis of religious identity cannot start from the descriptions of abstract systems of beliefs stabilized in the course of a group history. The identity of an individual or group has mainly to be defined by analyzing particular situations and historical relations among individuals or groups. In substance, the construction of identity is constantly changing because is a process that acquires and develops a variety of values and challenges derived from other agents and circumstances.

Put differently, identity construction is normally constructed on the basis of factors that are mutable. Such factors (including connection to ancestors,

5 For a critique of the essentialist concept of identity see Barth 1969; Remotti 1996, 2010; Baumann 1999; see also concepts such as “métissage” (Amselle 1999), “hybridization” (Canclini 2001; Bhabha 1994), and “branchements” (Amselle 2001). Also the concepts of cohabitation, cultural traffic and similarity converge towards a critique of the exclusivistic and essentialist concept of identity; see Chapter 12 and Destro – Pesce 2016.

family positions, gender bonds, etc.) are inevitably challenged by contingent cultural and social instable fluxes. This leads us back to the distinction between latent and explicit identity.

In an attempt to simplify a complex issue, we may say that what can lead to an outbreak of conflict may depend on the fact that one single group intends to define from its own particular ideological stance the conceptual, practical and territorial limits of its specific society. Consequently, other social groups sharing elements of the general latent identity will find themselves challenged and affected by that definition. They may feel excluded from or included in a new identity. If this process of inclusion-exclusion is not decided or accomplished by all the people involved, its inevitable result is open conflictuality.

3 The Social Effect of Conflicts

Antagonisms and contrasts characterizing the early groups of Jesus' followers cannot be interpreted merely in terms of "persecution" or of a contraposition between Christianity and Judaism. On the one hand, the contraposition between Judaism and Christianity in itself presupposes a rather anachronistic distinction between these two religious systems. Jesus' movement reasonably must be considered as one of the movements that existed within Jewish society. On the other hand, we suspect that within the conceptual scheme of persecution, the outbreak of conflict, instead to be seen as a multifaceted social mechanism present in everyday life, is attributed only to the Jewish side, to the position of the adversaries of Jesus' group. In other words, persecution is interpreted as the effect of hostility toward Jesus and his followers (who are thought to be peaceful people preaching love and forgiveness).

We are convinced that the theory of conflict can help to better understand reciprocal interactions or concrete mutual attitude of groups and social levels that operate within a same setting. Initially, we tried to explore some theoretical foundations of conflict, its potentialities and effects. Contrasts or conflicts can arise about the control of limited resources or in order to eliminate serious "limiting situations" (Schröder-Schmidt 2001, 1–24) that produce difficulties, shortages and imbalances. In many fields of human life limiting conditions may easily generate actions of revolt, the abandonment of a loosing group, or a split among different social actors. It happens that they may also lead more simply to a multilateral confrontation among adversaries in defense of one's identity.

Any conflict comprises several structural elements that are strongly controlled by the behavioral models prevailing in each culture. These models regu-

late the subjects in conflict, the procedures that may be undertaken, and the tools for managing the conflictual action or situation. As far as concrete actors are concerned, the behavioral models may vary according to their standard social status. In analyzing processes of conflict, it is very important to distinguish among the functions of the *élites* (also including the leader of a movement) and of the lower layers of the involved group (M.E. Brown 2001, 17–23). Conflicts frequently imply also witnesses or observers, who functionally allow the conflictual event to erupt and take effect. The presence of these actors constitutes the necessary scenario that determines the utility and possibility of victory or defeat, or other solutions (conciliation, arbitration, withdrawal).

Each culture envisages a certain type of gestural codes or performative rules that largely affect the events and circumstances of conflicts. Such events often include manifest acts of hostility, open declarations, ideological proclamations. But they may also coincide with silent or secret agreements that never come to the surface, or are not easily perceived by a group or by individuals. Finally, the ordinary mechanisms of conflict may be violent or not. It is sure that the aspect of violence is often overemphasized in the definition of conflict. Violent attitudes often are unexpected and bring about dishomogeneous effects. Violent attacks do not necessarily belong to the conflict as such.

Any conflict, as social action, has a cognitive function. In the struggle, the nature of the fighting parties becomes manifest in a way in which it has never previously been manifested. In many cases, the conflict appears as a means of exchange and communication. Any conflictual interaction brings about new knowledge. It is the very fact of being in opposition that presupposes a representation of the opponent as ‘enemy’. In other terms, the “self” is generally defined through or on the basis of an adversary, of somebody that can be reputed as a hostile and dangerous other (Bowman 2001, 29). Inevitably the bipolarity of conflict (“we and you”) implies a social reality divided into two segments or components perceived as opposed but reciprocally connected. This concretely leads to a definition of the adversary as an antithesis to “us”, conceived in turn in antithesis to “them”.

We must note furthermore that the polarization of conflict sometimes brings about—at least temporarily—a fictitious unification of different groups who fight together under a single banner or a unitary purpose. This means that when dealing with texts written in a conflictual environment and used as instruments of conflict, we must carefully de-codify the representation of the adversaries contained in the texts. They represent specific concepts and situations that may not reflect historical reality. This is particularly important, for example, for texts produced in a context of contrapositions between groups of Jews that were followers of Jesus and other Jews that did not believe

in him. We generally find in some texts good representation of the dimensions, aims and efficacy of an action of conflict. But we must recognize that they are instrumental to the struggle, and written with the aim of encouraging it, raising resources and supporters (in order to gain victory).

The production of knowledge about persons and groups (and their identity and destiny) that occurs during a struggle represents, as is generally accepted, a fundamental factor in the construction of the collective memory. We want only to stress, however, that a collective memory may produce a destruction of knowledge of the past history or its re-construction in the light of the outcome of the conflict (Halbwachs 1997; J. Assmann 2013; Connerton 1989). It combines a re-invention of history and a construction or framing of the future (Destro – Pesce 2002b). In any case, the cognitive function of conflict is something rather different from the actual historical effect of the struggle.⁶

Finally, we return to an earlier point: conflict has a transforming capacity. Simmel (1908, 247–336) held that the passage from struggle to peace could result in three possible outcomes: victory, compromise or reconciliation.⁷ Victory leads to an upward shift, while defeat leads to the opposite result. The destruction of an adversary or, conversely, the process of his persuasion have different repercussions on the winner. Victory over an adversary does not stop with his defeat but may lead to a further transformation, causing a contrary reaction that reverberates both on the winner and the loser, and their respective groups.

The outcome of an action of conflict is therefore perpetuated by a series of reactions that eventually involves different groups from those that originally were engaged in the conflict. Even the ritual solutions of conflict cannot eliminate the concatenation of inevitable reactions arising from the outcome of a conflict (Gluckman 1962). Rituality can at times suspend such reactions, which, however, may resume, spread and increase more or less dramatically after a period of time.

6 The language has a very special role in conflict. The language of the elite or that of the leader may prevail over the language of ordinary people (Schroeder and Schmidt 2001, 1–24). Generally the language expresses the point of view of the leader or the elite, who are presumed to have a catalyzing force in conflicts (M.E. Brown 2001).

7 “Durch Sieg und Niederlage, durch Versöhnung, durch Kompromis” (Simmel 208, 327). English translation: Simmel 1955, 112 and 112–123.

4 Jesus: The Conception of an Irreconcilable Conflict

The groups of Jesus' followers were numerous and had dissimilar profiles as is well documented by historical research on the first two centuries,⁸ at least after the appearance of W. Bauer's book in 1934.⁹ From the very outset, as it is well known, the various groups of Jesus' followers were characterized by some divergencies, which constitute evidence for many internal conflicts among them. From the time of F.Ch. Baur onwards, this fact has been central to the history of Christianity.¹⁰ Examples of internal conflict can be found between the positions of Galilean and Jerusalem groups of Jesus (Destro – Pesce 2014b, 91–98), in divergencies between Pauline and Jacobite groups, inside the different tendencies within the Johannine groups, and also in the relationships between Jews that were followers of Jesus and non-Jews followers. Even in Jerusalem, in the period 30–70 CE we find evidence of divergencies and conflicts among groups of followers (Destro – Pesce 2016).

From the earliest times, however, early Christianity was also characterized by external conflicts. Jesus himself is presented as a pivotal target of conflicts (see John 1:11: “He came unto his own, and his own received him not”) of which he eventually becomes the victim. The conflict with other groups was perpetuated on occasion of the deaths of Stephen, of James (Mimouni 2015, 219–243, 335–337) and of those of Paul (Penna 209–210) and Peter. It is a series of fatal clashes that appears to begin by Jesus' master, John the Baptizer, who also underwent execution (Lupieri 2013, 29–34). Jesus' preaching, as well as Paul's, always insisted—as we shall see—on the inevitability of conflict (cf. for example Luke 12:51 // Matthew 10:34; 1 Thess 3:4).¹¹

8 In relation to the groups of Rome, Lampe (1995, 90) wrote: “Second-Century Rome saw: Christian groups following Valentinian, Marcionite, Carpocratian, Theodotian, Modalistic, Montanist, or Quartodecimanian teachings; Cerdo-followers; house churches of (what was only later called) ‘orthodox’ faith; a Jewish Christian circle which still observed the Torah; groups with a logos-theology that was too complicated for less educated Christians; circles which believed in the millennium and others which did not”. See also Destro – Pesce 2014b, 81–136; Pesce 2014.

9 W. Bauer 1934¹. See now the French translation edited by S.C. Mimouni, with the introduction of A. Le Boulluec (Bauer 2007).

10 We must distinguish the dialectical conception of conflict in F.C. Baur from the Manchester theory of a structural function of conflict within society.

11 We have already seen (Chapter 1 § 4) that the gospels do not only deal with an abstract image of conflict, but describe many times concrete situations of contention and division in the network of personal relationships and in the configuration of socio-familial bonds, actually affirming that Jesus brings “division” in the households (Luke 12:52–53).

We merely mention that such conflicts with the outer world were fought on two distinct fronts: between the groups of Jesus' followers and the Jews, and between Jesus' followers and the Gentiles. The Acts of the Apostles depict a scenario, in which the frontlines are represented (within the cities of Asia Minor) in terms of what we have defined as triangular conflicts of integration (Destro – Pesce 2008a, 39–63).

Where did the *root* of these internal and external conflicts lie? Were they simply a necessary step leading to the construction of the identity of the post-Jesus movement, or was the conflict a radical intrinsic element to Jesus' vision of reality, shared by at least a part of his followers (cf. Mark 10:30; Matthew 5:11–12; 5:44; 6:24; 10:23; 23:34; John 1:11; 12:37–43. Cf. Destro – Pesce 2000, 131–132)?

The first hypothesis proposed here is that the vision of human reality that emerges from Jesus' words and actions is dominated by the perception of his irreconcilable conflictual situation in the society of his time. We believe that Jesus simultaneously perceived the difference between the conflict existing in human reality and the harmony inherently underlying the action of God. The simultaneous necessity of struggle and peace in Jesus could be understood on the basis of the theory according to which conflicts are often functional to the construction of a kind of unity and of a successive pacification (Simmel 1908, 247–249).

In conclusion, Jesus' view was dominated by the conviction that a conflict existed both within humanity and between the human and the divine world.¹² The language attributed to Jesus reveals important traces of this perception. Our examination of the question will envisage four points.

4.1 *The Preaching of the Baptizer and Jesus as Sources of Conflict*

The preaching of the Baptizer and Jesus takes the form of a public judgment of individuals and groups. This judgment entails a conflictual vision of reality. The public denouncement of transgressors of the Torah is typical of John the Baptizer, as demonstrated by his public censure of king Herod. This *de facto* provokes contrasts and hostilities:

Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, added to them all by shutting up John in prison (Luke 3:19–20).

The household is one of the places where Jesus concentrates his challenging action, but also his attempts at pacification.

12 See e.g. Matthew 6:10.

The public condemnation of Herod's misdeeds is based on the rule stated in Lev 19:17b:

you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself.

This is a cardinal text because of the use of the verb *elegchô*, of considerable importance in Jewish legislation and religiosity. It means "to reprimand one's neighbor for a sin". A similar type of preaching also characterizes Jesus, and continues to resonate among the groups of his followers (see, for example, Paul in 1 Cor 14:23–25; cf. Pesce 1994, 191–196). Jesus' goal is the conversion of his interlocutors, the transformation of their way of life. He who accepts his preaching is "a son of peace" (Luke 10:6), while those who reject it are condemned to undergo the final judgment (Luke 10:11–12). The former undergoes a process of pacification, while the latter are destined to condemnation. We must take into account the radical attitude of Jesus. Jesus denies all possibility of mediation or agreement. According to usual terms, his action was non-political, insofar as he does not contemplate any form of compromise.¹³ In Jesus' vision, the only outcomes of conflict provoked by his preaching are either victory or defeat.¹⁴

4.2 "You Cannot Serve God and Mammon" (Luke 16:13 // Matthew 6:24)

The prayer of the *Shema'* is a liturgical text comprising three biblical passages (Deut 6:4–119; 11:13–21; Num 15:37–41), preceded and followed by blessings (Pesce 1985b, 26–38).¹⁵ Of interest here is the sentence in the first biblical passage of the *Shema'* "and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut 6:5). The passage presents the love of God as the foremost aspect of Judaic religiosity, providing instructions on how this love should be put into practice. The triple repetition of "with all" (*be khol*) clearly emphasizes how this love must be total and absolute. The ancient Palestinian Targum, which condenses aspects of the Judaic spiritual experience through brief expositions of the biblical text, offers the incontrovertible proof of how the faithful in Israel considered the task of loving God with all one's heart, soul and strength. Both the *Palestinian*

13 On the role of compromise, see also J. Freund 1983, 279–287.

14 See above the three possibilities of solution to conflict according to Simmel 1908, 312–323.

15 The story of the formation of this text is not totally clear. Its origin, in any case, is to be found in the liturgy of the Temple (*Mishnah Tamid* 5). Originally, the recitation of *Shema'* was preceded by the Decalogue, as attested by Papyrus Nash, *Mishnah Berakot* 1,2; *Mishnah Tamid* 5, 1; Josephus *Ant.* IV 8,13.

Targum and the *Targum Onqelos* understood “with all your might” of Deut 6:5 in the sense of “with all your wealth” (*Mammon*, in Aramaic). This is of great relevance, since it reveals that the Judaic groups that produced the Targums believed that money and wealth, too, should be directed towards the obedience to God. These groups believed that the possession of money and wealth was not in contradiction with the obedience to God.¹⁶

The language of the gospel texts allows us to hypothesize with some degree of certainty that the prayer of *Shema*’ constituted a central element of Jesus’ experience and reflection.¹⁷ As in the Targum, Jesus maintains that only some material conditions allow the attainment of the fundamental religious goal of the *Shema*’, that is the obedience to God (that requires all one’s strength and resources). What is notable is that while the Targum states that one may be obedient to God with one’s money, Jesus denies this possibility:

No slave can serve (*latreuô*) two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve (*latreuô*) God and Mammon (Luke 16:13 // Matthew 6:24) (see also 2 Clem 6:1 and Thomas 47).

The verb “serve” (*latreuô*) seems to hint at the theme of total dedication to God, typical of the prayer of the *Shema*’ (the LXX of Deut 6:13 translates, in fact, *bd* with *latreuô*). Jesus seems to argue against the interpretation transmitted by the Targums: he presupposes that God and Mammon are necessarily in conflict with each other.

In Jesus’ view the conflict between God and Mammon assumes a considerable symbolic and social significance. Jesus shows great concern for the plight of the poor, the *ptochoi*. He is convinced that the victims of present injustice will be blessed in the kingdom of God. On the contrary, he thinks that for the rich it is extremely difficult to enter the kingdom (Mark 10:25 // Matthew 19:23–24 // Luke 18:24–25). The future kingdom implies the overturning of the present unjust situation (Luke 6:20–21.24–25; see, also, the parable of Lazarus in Luke 16:19–31). The use of “dishonest wealth” (Luke 16:9) is permitted only in order to make friends for oneself in the Kingdom of God.

16 Some targumic explanations on Deut 6:7 have the same meaning and show how all aspects of life should be directed toward the obedience to God. The *Targum* underlines for example that such obedience is due “also when you will attend to prepare your wedding ceremony”.

17 Mark 12:28–34 // Luke 10:25–28 // Matthew 22:35–40; Matthew 6:24 par.; perhaps Mark 7:19–21 (see its use of the word “heart”); Luke 14:15–24 // Matthew 22:1–14.

4.3 “I Came to Bring Fire”

Jesus’ affirmation about the impossibility of serving God and Mammon gives origin to behaviors that can provoke disagreements and conflicts within society. The first category of Jesus’ followers, the so-called itinerants, are to abandon their property and families. The second category, the so-called sedentary disciples, must sell at least part of their property, or make their homes available to give hospitality to Jesus, his movement and to the poor (Chapter 1). These behaviors could generate oppositions and conflicts that could become very bitter at times.

A series of texts bears witness to the situation. The first is in Luke 12:49–52:¹⁸

I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three.

In the words “I came to bring fire to the earth”, the mention of fire is a reference to an important element of the Judaic collective imagination. H. Bietenhard points out that in the Hebrew Bible, “the fire [...] that accompanies Yahweh” appears to serve a double purpose: on the one hand, it is conceived as the sign of divine justice (Gen 19:24; Exod 9:24; Lev 10:2; Num 11:1; 16:35; 2 Kgs 1:10; Am 1:4.7), while on the other, it is presented as a sign of the grace of Yahweh, who uses fire to show his approval of an offering (Gen 15:17; Lev 9:23 ss.; Judg 6:21; 1 Kgs 18:38; 1 Chr 21:26; 2 Chr 7:1). Fire is also a sign used by Yahweh to lead his people (the clouds and columns of fire in Exod 13:12; Num 14:14). Yahweh speaks from within fire (Deut 4:21; 15:33 etc.). Yahweh himself is a consuming fire (Deut 4:24; 9:3; Isa 33:14). In the theophanies, particularly in the context of the alliance and the idea of justice, Yahweh appears accompanied by fire (Gen 15:17; Exod 3:2ss; 19:18; Judg 6:21; 13:20; Num 14:14; Isa 4:5; Ezek 1:28) (Bietenhard 1976, 735). In the Community rule of Qumran, fire is the punishment for the wicked in the final judgment (1 QS 2:8; 4:13 1QH 17:13). [...] The joint influences of Iranic and Stoic doctrine brought to Judaism a conception of the final conflagration of the world [through the fire] (Sib 2:186 ff;

18 The composition of Luke 12, 49–53 is divided into two parts: (vv. 49–51 e 52–53). Its parallel (Matthew 10:34–36) also presents a division in two literary units (vv. 34 e 35–36). We may therefore suppose that already the source of Luke and Matthew (= Q) presented these two literary units in the same order. It is likely that the *logion* of Luke 12:50 was not part of the composition of Q and may come from Mark 10:38.

238 ff., and elsewhere), one which is also encountered in the “little apocalypse” of the Qumran texts (1 QH 3:25ss)” (Bietenhard 1976, 735).

In the vision of Luke, fire is presented as the instrument of destruction with which God will annihilate those who reject his message:

but on the day that Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and sulfur from heaven and destroyed all of them it will be like that on the day that the Son of Man is revealed (Luke 17:29–30).

Fire, in brief, causes the division of the good from the bad, and is therefore the ultimate instrument of punishment, and in the same time the establishment of order (cf. also Bietenhard 1976, 733–4).

The verse in Luke 12:49, “I came to cast fire upon the earth”, therefore implies the idea of the fire as the judgment of God, manifested generally through the destruction of evil-doers. Jesus’ mission is to bring fire to the earth. His actions are therefore imagined in intensely conflictual terms: fire represents one of the highest forms of conflict in Judaic imagination. However, the fire provoked by Jesus’ actions does not have the aim of destroying evildoers. In Luke 9:54, in fact, James and John wish for a destructive fire on the Samaritan village that refuses to welcome the group of Jesus’ disciples. Jesus rejects their request. The purpose of his “casting fire upon the earth” is not to bring about a final and total destruction, but rather to mark the beginning of the final judgment of God.

Nonetheless, the fact that Jesus positions himself in the perspective of the advent of the eschatological fire, provides us with an important key for understanding his project as a whole. We have said that Jesus does not seek agreements or mediations with his adversaries, and does not look for any compromise in finding a solution to the contradictions produced by his preaching and actions. He expects the solution to take the form of a final supernatural event. It is therefore plausible that the absolute lack of mediation in Jesus’ action cannot but give rise to bitter reactions among his adversaries.¹⁹

On the basis of Luke 12:49, Jesus imagines that he himself will ultimately be consumed by the destroying eschatological fire (“I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!”). This implies

19 Luke 12:50 has probably placed the saying taken from Mark 10:38b (“I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!”) immediately after the saying on fire, because he had in mind the theme of the baptism with fire (Luke 3:16 // Matthew 3:11).

a highly conflictual conception. The text says that Jesus' actions and words *de facto* provoke a conflict of vast proportions, in which he himself will be involved. It is not the idea of the redemptive suffering of Jesus that is foregrounded. It is Jesus' actions that provokes a radical and definitive struggle.²⁰

In the light of a theory of conflicts, it is obvious that the conflictual attitude of Jesus produces a strong reaction against his person: it brings about his death, allegorically expressed by Luke as 'baptism'. The early-Christian interpretation of Jesus' death, testified by Luke, offers a secondary theological interpretation, but not a social explanation of the fact.

4.4 "I Came Not to Bring Peace, but Sword"

We broaden our observation in relation to Jesus' saying of the "sword". Matthew 10:34 ("I came not to bring peace, but sword", *machaira*) indicates that Jesus' preaching has the intent to fight the adversaries with all his forces. This opens a conflict. The sword theme could be an echo of Isaiah 49:2, which says that the mouth of the Messiah is like a sword. The sword motif is not developed elsewhere in the Gospel of Matthew. In the parallel passage, Luke omits the reference to the sword choosing to write "I came to bring division (*diamerismos*)" (12:51). Luke presents this theme in other contexts and with different words. The first occurrence is:

this child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too (2:34b–35).

The sword motif again explodes into relevance during the Last Supper (Luke 22:35–38), this time in a different way. Jesus tells the apostles to buy a sword (*machaira*, v.36) and they answer that they already have two (v.38). In doing so, Luke's Jesus indicates a turning point in events that involves an outburst of strong conflict. The struggle is underway and swords will be required.

We shall leave aside the problem of whether the swords in question are real or metaphorical. Of far greater importance is the fact that the scene of Jesus' arrest, with its reference to the swords and clubs of those who come to arrest him (and the reaction of a disciple, who uses a sword to cut off the right ear of a slave), is certainly one of the culminating moments of the conflict caused by Jesus' preaching and deeds.

20 The additional comment on baptism was probably not part of Jesus' saying concerning fire, but was inserted by Luke. It contains an implicit reference to the death of Jesus. See also Destro – Pesce 2014a, 62–65.

However, another important aspect needs to be explored. The gospels emphasize what we earlier referred to as the defining and cognitive function of conflicts. Jesus' arrest transforms him in a "wrong-doer" (*anomos*) (Luke 22:37), or bandit (*lestes*) (Luke 22:52 // Matthew 26:55). In the explosion of any conflict, each party consolidates in itself and at the same time defines the other according to its own social aims and cultural outlooks. In this way, the physiognomy of the adversary is generally altered, and criminalized. Conflicts have generally an intensive cognitive effect insofar as they disclose unexpressed and underlying tendencies. This point could be perhaps implied in Luke's acknowledgement that Jesus is a "sign of contradiction" (*eis semeion antilegomenon*, Luke 2:35).

5 Jesus' Ultimate Aim

In reality, there also exist texts in which Jesus claims that he has come to bring peace (or exhorts his disciples to bring it). In our opinion, the theory of conflict outlined above may explain this apparent contradiction. As we have already said, conflicts often have the function of creating presuppositions for pacification or integration. The final result of conflict is victory or defeat. Both may be able to lead to reconciliation, that is to elimination of division or dualism. On the basis of this theory, it is reasonable to hypothesize that Jesus believed that only a struggle could lead to the unity foreseen by God's will.

The ultimate aim of Jesus' actions seems not to have been a destructive conflict, but—through battle—a necessary renewal and pacification. This is confirmed by the fact that statements where Jesus claims to have come to bring the sword or fire are accompanied by words that speak of "bringing peace". All this explains why Jesus takes violent action in the Temple (Matthew 21:12–13 parr.), while exhorting (in Matthew 5:44–45):

love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.²¹

Also in Matthew 23:37, the final aim of Jesus' action is Israel's pacification:

²¹ It explains why Jesus says that he came to bring division, while, on the other hand, he states that "every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand" (Matthew 12:25).

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!²²

If we understand correctly that Jesus saw destructive action only as a necessary step to attaining unification, we see also that the conflict he provoked took place entirely within Judaism's fundamental values. His aim was the reconstitution of the unity of the people of Israel.

22 An analysis of the idea of reconciliation in the preaching and other activities of Jesus is outside of our purpose here.

Between Family and Temple: Jesus and Sacrifices

1 The Functions of Sacrifices

Since the last decades of the nineteenth century an uninterrupted and extensive scholarly debate has been devoted to the definition of sacrifices.¹ We need, therefore, to start from some recent general definitions of these rituals, and of the nature of Jewish sacrifices in the first century CE in the Land of Israel. It will be necessary to construct a model, taking into account some of the features of sacrifices brought to light by theoretical discussions and historical research.²

An anthropological analysis and a historical reconstruction form the departure point of our analysis. The anthropological analysis (Destro 2001) presents a theory on concrete social and cultural conditions within which sacrifices exercise their functions, together with an interpretation of sacrifices based on the hypothesis that the “control of life” is one of their basic aims. The historical reconstruction (Destro – Pesce 2002c, 2002d) concerns Jesus and Jewish sacrifices. It shows that, in Leviticus, sin offerings expiate only inadvertent sins and that in the first century CE there was a long-standing debate on the ritual of expiation of intentional sins and on *Yom ha-kippurim*. Jesus accepted the Temple’s sacrifices,³ but assigned no function to the Temple’s rituals and to *Yom ha-kippurim*, as far as the expiation of intentional sins was concerned.

For these reasons, we think necessary to summarize some historical and anthropological theories on sacrificial rituals in order to understand Jesus’ attitudes towards the immolation of animals.

1 In this chapter we publish a revised version of “Between Family and Temple. Jesus and Sacrifices”, *HTS Theologies Studies—Theological Studies* 58 (2002) 472–501. The paper was first presented at the conference organized by the Context Group at the University of South Africa, Pretoria, in June 2001. On similar topics we have also published Destro – Pesce 1999a; Pesce 2001b; Destro – Pesce 2002c; 2002d. See also Pesce 2011a, 54–120.

2 The history of research demonstrates that models valid for all times and cultures are not available. Furthermore, any model can be integrated and modified, since definitions and concepts are unavoidably historically contingent and culturally conditioned. As a result, the same phenomenon may be analyzed simultaneously through different approaches using different or complementary frames.

3 On Jesus and the Temple of Jerusalem see also Lupieri 2011.

1.1 *V. Valeri's Preliminary Definition: Ends, Contents, Treatments*

By sacrifice I mean any ritual action that includes the consecration of an "offering" to a deity. This offering is made up of one or more individuals belonging to species having symbolic values exploited in the course of the ritual. [...] Usually the offering, after having being entirely consecrated to the deity, is divided in two parts: the first goes to the deity alone, the second goes to the sacrificer and the other participants, among whom it is shared according to the order of their rank (Valeri 1985, 38).

Valeri suggests that:

Every sacrifice must be described as a function of the following features: (1) its end and the occasion on which it is made; (2) the deity or deities to whom it is addressed; (3) the content of the offering and its symbolic value; (4) the way the offering is treated and apportioned in the rite.

The ends and occasions of sacrifices as well as the offering's symbolic values and treatment [should] receive particular emphasis as the features that best make it possible to discover the fundamental principle of sacrificial action (Valeri 1985, 38).

The last statement of Valeri is particularly worthy of attention, because it emphasizes the range of ends, contents and treatments associated with sacrifices. He stresses the great variety of occasions on which sacrifices are practiced in all cultures. Indeed, too often the theoretical models neglect the fact that different kinds of sacrifice have functions that clearly differentiate them from one another (even within each culture). Scholars often posit theories based only on a certain type of sacrifice: for example, in the Jewish case, the sacrifice for sin (*hattat*), or that of communion (*zebah shelamim*), are often discussed to the neglect of others.

Some years later, Valeri (1994) formulated a second definition of sacrifice, which C. Grottanelli (1999, 14) summarized as follows:

In its fully developed form, the ritual [of sacrifice] includes the following acts, in the following order: 1) induction 2) the killing 3) the renunciation and finally 4) the consumption.

Grottanelli (1999, 14) stresses the importance of the latter aspect of Valeri's theory. The consumption of the sacrificial food is part of the ritual enjoyment. In this light, sacrifice is defined as:

the ritualized taking away of life (or the destruction / removal from the sphere of the purely human use, of precious objects, understood as marks of life), to obtain some benefit.

Briefly, what strikes us as interesting in Valeri's definition, is his focus on (a) various types of sacrifice in the same society, (b) several features present in every sacrificial action and (c) different existential or social situations requiring a sacrifice. Valeri is referring to ancient Hawaiian society, thus dealing with (d) a concrete society. In substance, his "theory of ritual" cannot be seen as extraneous to or divorced from the specific historical culture in which the ritual is practiced.

This illustrates that generalizations are possible only if we start from specific ethnographical cases. Valeri confronts us with what P. Bourdieu defines as the problem of "taking into consideration a specific cultural area with the aim of finding out what does not vary in the variety observed, i.e. the structure" (Bourdieu 1995, 14)

1.2 *B. Malina's Definition: Sanctification and Interaction*

In *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (1993), B. Malina's point of departure is the idea that the processes of sanctification and sacrifice correspond to two stages or phases, which take place at different times. The process of sanctification comes first and constitutes the "presupposition of sacrifice":

The process [...] of setting persons and things apart from or for God is called sanctification [...]. The process of interacting with God by means of persons and things thus set apart is called sacrifice (Malina 1993, 168).

In order to understand the process of sanctification, Malina is clearly referring to A. Van Gennep's three phases (separation, marginalization, and aggregation), and is speaking of "zones of interaction" between human beings and deities. He conceives sanctification in terms of both space and time and sees the sacrificial interaction with God primarily as a patron-client relation:

Sacrifices to God are analogous to gifts given to higher-class patrons. What patrons want of their clients is recognition of honor, submission, a following. Sacrifice to God symbolizes a gift of a client to a patron, an expression of an asymmetrical but reciprocal relationship with a view to power, protection, and the joy of bathing in the presence of the patron of patrons... The

object is taken by the ritual leader of the intermediate or marginal zone, who acts as a bridge within the donor space and the space of God, space that symbolizes their worlds. By means of this bridge and the activity of the marginal zone, the benefits of the patron pass to the donor, who may be an individual, a group, or the nation at large (Malina 1993, 170–171).

Malina notes that, in order to understand Jewish sacrifice in the first century CE, it is necessary to examine the nature of the patron-client relationship, which he sees as the dominant social relation of Jewish society of the time (Malina 1996b, 27; 1993, 170). The purpose of sacrifice is therefore to maintain the “assigned and inherited social status” of people, through the protection of powerful patrons (1993, 170).

In our opinion, the useful features of Malina’s scheme are: the distinction between sanctification and sacrifice, the need to understand the meaning of sacrifice in the light of the social relations of a specific cultural setting, the strict link between a theory of ritual and a theory of culture, and a definition of Jewish sacrifice.

A few years later, in 1996, Malina dealt more systematically with sacrifices in general, and Jewish sacrifice in particular, within the framework of Greek and Roman Mediterranean religions. He formulated a new definition of sacrifice, according to which “sacrifice is a ritual in which a deity or deities is/are offered some form of inducement, rendered humanly irretrievable, with a view to some life-effect for the offerer” (1996b, 37). For each part of his definition, Malina offers the following meaning:

[a] A ritual sacrifice deals with social lines in some way. It is by means of these lines or boundaries that people get to understand where things fit, so that society makes sense. Sacrifice is always about these lines or boundaries. [b] The deity is always some ultimate All that accounts for and embraces the human drive to make sense out of all human experiences. [c] Inducement includes the goods or services that are directed at the deity with a view to having an effect. [d] Rendering the mediating entity irretrievable transforms it into an irrecoverable form: killing, baking, pouring out, burning salt, incense. [e] The effect sought in sacrifice is a life-effect: the maintenance or restoration of life, ascribed solely to the deity [...] Life-maintenance sacrifices celebrate life in festivity. Life-restoration sacrifices revitalize after accidental deviance, or after stepping outside the human realm: mother in the realm of the pre-human; husband/son in the realm of the dead (Malina 1996b, 38)

The new aspect of the 1996 definition lies essentially in point [e], affirming that the effect of the sacrifice is a life-effect, or life maintenance.

It should be noted that, with regard to Israelite animal offerings, Malina (1996b, 35) specifies that “(in) Israel [...] there is a gradual constriction of domestic sacrifice, in favor of a centralized templar activity.” This seems especially significant with regard to Levitical sacrifices.

What is distinctive of Israelite sacrifice in its Levitical reformulation is that it is confined to the Jerusalem Temple. This makes all sacrifice political sacrifice, with God understood in political terms. He is no longer “patron” (a kinified relationship), but “king” or “lord” (a politified relationship). With the politification of religion, the Levitical reform comes to dominate domestic religion as secondary (Malina 1996b, 35–36).⁴

1.3 *H. Eilberg-Schwartz’s Interpretation of Jewish Sacrifice*

H. Eilberg-Schwartz, in *Savage in Judaism* (1990), attempted an anthropological interpretation of Jewish sacrifice, though he did not devote many pages to the subject. In his book the theme of sacrifice appears within a series of reflections on human sins and the expiation thereof. Nonetheless, Eilberg-Schwartz’s language and categories reflect an approach to the topic of sacrifice that has found favor among a number of contemporary scholars. His basic idea is that:

the very premise of the sacrificial system is that God will permit Israelites to sacrifice animals instead of sacrificing themselves and their children (Eilberg-Schwartz 1990, 135).

The cultural premise is that of substitution:

the sacrificial system rests on the idea that an animal’s life is a substitute for the life of the person who brings the animal to be slaughtered (Eilberg-Schwartz 1990, 134).

The discourse of substitution is accordingly connected to a parallel between animals and human beings:

4 On the basis of his latest positions, Malina significantly integrated his previous definition of sacrifices, in the third edition (2001) of his *New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*.

The dependence of the sacrificial systems on the metaphorical relationship between Israelites and their herds and flocks explains why only animals from their herds and flock can be used as offerings (Eilberg-Schwartz 1990, 135).

Most interesting here is the fact that Eilberg-Schwartz develops his analysis by offering an image of ancient Israel as a pastoral society. It is a pastoral type of life that constitutes an influential setting for many of the Israelites' social relationships. Thus, his attention is focused on those animals belonging to the domestic flock or herd, which as such, was closely related to people's material and symbolic life. On such basis, animals may be considered as directly reflecting conditions and targets of the Israelites' ordinary life. Any action performed on animals of the flock or herd can be regarded as performed on people.

Eilberg-Schwartz, however, restricts himself to an analysis of a small segment of the sacrificial system. Defining animals as substitutes for the offerer, he neglects the confirmatory or transformative effects of sacrifice. On the other hand, what remains important in Eilberg-Schwartz's thesis is that sacrifice is strongly linked to *life*. It is related to the equivalence of lives and to the exchange of the life of the offered animal for the life of the human offerer.

Furthermore, elaborating on his theory, and concurring with J. Milgrom (1991), Eilberg-Schwartz confirms that the Levitical sacrifices concern non-voluntary sins.

The substitution only appeases God for relatively minor sins, such as unwittingly violating a law (Lev 4); for heinous crimes, such as murder, God demands the person's life (Eilberg-Schwartz 1990, 136).

Sacrifice, therefore, does not bring about expiation for the most serious sins committed deliberately. This interpretation shows that sacrifice is not a mechanism that resolves all the problems of life and of death.

It should be borne in mind, however, that Eilberg-Schwartz is not facing the problem of a global and general definition of sacrifice, nor does he set out to analyze the various types of Jewish sacrifices and their different functions.

1.4 *M. Douglas' Anthropological Theory of Jewish Sacrifice. Bodies and Microcosms*

Mary Douglas (1999) advanced an anthropological theory of Jewish sacrifice as it appears in Leviticus (see also Douglas 1966, 1993, 1993/94, 1996). Her theory is neither an interpretation of sacrifice in general nor an approach to all biblical sacrifices. According to Douglas, in Leviticus "the act of sacrifice is less a

killing than a transformation from one kind of existence to another" (1999, 69). Douglas hereby expresses the idea that any sacrifice modifies life. From her words, it appears that physical and symbolic modifications are intrinsic to the act of imposing death on a living being. Once burned, for instance, the victim is transformed into smoke, which ascends toward God.

It must be noted that, in her theorizing on sacrifices, Douglas focuses on the victim's body, a singular locus of creative reflection. She assumes that sacrifices attain meaning by human actions, that is, through the way in which animals are ritually treated. In particular, she envisages inner and outer parts of the animal, their specific or reciprocal order, and how they are used on the altar:

The first chapters of *Leviticus* are largely about *how* to make a sacrifice [...] To find the underlying logic we have to look carefully at what it says about bodies and parts of bodies, especially what is inner or outer, on top and underneath, and pay special attention when it emphasizes by frequent repetitions and strong prohibitions (Douglas 1999, 69).

Douglas renders her interpretation explicit: the body of the sacrificial animal is thought of as a microcosm. In other words, the authors of *Leviticus* regarded the anatomy of the animal as a reflection of the cosmic order established by God.

Being convinced that the body of the sacrificial animal may be conceived as a microcosm, Douglas concentrates her attention on the quartering of the animal. She minutely analyzes the ritual use of the parts of the quartered animal and stresses the importance of the positioning of the parts on the altar. In her opinion, this is the action that clarifies some essential assumptions in *Leviticus*. In particular, she emphasizes the meaning of the suet around some vital parts. She believes that such suet is no less important than the blood:

Suet is not to be confused with ordinary animal fat [...] The suet lies over and around the seat of life, the seat of thought and emotion... Suet is found [...] in a middle zone over and around the kidneys and over the entrails [...] The vital pieces of anatomy (kidneys and liver lobe) which have been selected for a special consecration on the altar are found in the body engulfed in the suet which lies around the diaphragm. The suet separates the entrails, which comprise the seat of thought and emotions and the semen which is the seat, the principal of fertility, from the upper part which in the live animal is accessed through throat and mouth (Douglas 1999, 71, 72, 73, 74).

Human actions shape and transform the victim. Ritual activities are at the center of such human transformation of the victim's body. Douglas further defines the overall action of the sacrificial ritual as:

a game of building blocks in which God is the player and the object is to rearrange the dismembered body so as to model some divine construction of the universe and a teaching about life and death. In this architectural game rules about positioning, such as 'over' or 'under', are necessary for interpreting not only sacrifice, but the whole book. In a diagram, position is everything; in a sacred text, the prohibitions that set things apart are crucial (Douglas 1999, 75).

A correspondence, even a strong interconnection, between the two orders is evident. Each of them answers to the other. Together they make the supreme order explicit:

Two kinds of ordering are in play, one the arrangement of the internal parts of the living being, that is, the normal order of the animal's anatomy, and the other, their order on the altar. For the altar in every case the middle zone, the suet or fat area, is taken out first and burnt on the altar (Douglas 1999, 76).

To understand how the *Leviticus* sacrifices expiate sins, Douglas makes recourse to a specific interpretation of ancient sacrifices. She maintains that in almost all religions, sacrifice has an indissoluble connection with oracles. Only after an oracular response would it be known which sacrifice had to be offered to remedy misfortune:

Divination is the institution that usually links sin, misfortune, and sacrifice. There is some misfortune, the oracle finds the causes and prescribes the remedy, a sacrifice. There are also judicial problems which are commonly solved by oracle, for example to find the truth between contending parties or to support an appeal from an unacceptable verdict [...] Far from being a snare and a sin, divination actually meets a demand for truth (Douglas 1999, 110, 111–112).

Douglas maintains that *Leviticus* marks a break between sacrifice and oracles, which were forbidden at a certain point in the evolution of the Jewish religion (Douglas 1999, 123). She openly recognizes that "unwitting sins are the only

kind of sin which call forth the rituals of sacrifice" (Douglas 1999, 125). The reason for this restriction would lie in the original connection of sacrifice with oracle. Originally, the law about inadvertent sins aimed to prevent to bring into question the response of an oracle:

The Law of sin offerings says that regardless of your knowledge or intentions, when you have discovered (by divination), what you did wrong, you must make restitution plus one fifth of the value of things stolen, and pay up a ewe lamb, or a she-goat or a bird so as to get atonement done for your sin. Whether you knew about it or did not know about it is irrelevant, the oracle has convicted you and you must do the ritual. By this device arguing and protesting innocence can quickly be dismissed, and the validity of the oracle is not brought into question.

In conclusion, for the purposes of our research, Douglas has the merit of having illustrated more than anyone else the principle of cosmic order being expressed in the body of the victim, recomposed on the altar through sacrifice. She herself claims: "The central idea of this book is that *Leviticus* exploits to the full an ancient tradition which makes a parallel between Mount Sinai and the tabernacle" (Douglas 1999, 59). "Sacrifice is one of the main figural motives with which it presents the principles of God's Creation and the divine order of existence" (Douglas 1999, 66).

It nevertheless seems to us that her underlining of the "figural" meaning of the sacrifice leads her to attribute less weight to the transformative effect of the ritual, though she does raise the matter at the beginning.

1.5 *The Effectiveness of Sacrifice*

To conclude this brief overview of theories, we would like to point out that sacrifice is always a complex ritual action. It generally aims to obtain from the deity (or any supernatural force) the right to exercise *control over life* (and/or to reduce the threat of death). Killing and offering an innocent victim, in an appropriate way, is culturally considered the correct instrument to receive from supernatural forces the right, exclusively reserved to them, to exercise such control.

As far as Jewish sacrifices are concerned, according to *Leviticus*, (a) the victims' blood serves to purify the holy places of the temple and, thus, enables God to be permanently present in the Temple of Jerusalem; (b) there are various categories of sacrifices, but only one of them serves to expiate inadvertent sins; (c) there are no sacrifices that can expiate intentional sins. Intentional sins are subject to civil and penal law, as well as are subject to the punishment

of God, and are cancelled by the annual ritual of *Yom ha-kippurim*. However, there are different ways of understanding how this ritual expiated intentional sins. There is evidence that during the Second Temple a degree of uncertainty existed over some aspects of its effectiveness.

We should add that, in the Greek-Roman world, sacrifices were carried out at an altar that had to be situated where the deity was imagined to be present: a temple or a sacred place within the domestic area. In Jewish culture, the connection between sacrifice and a sacred place is equally necessary. Following biblical and levitical texts, there is only one place and only one temple where the deity is believed to be present.

2 The Case of Jesus

2.1 *John the Baptizer's Criticism of Yom ha-kippurim*

Jesus' attitude towards sacrifices can be summed up in a sentence: he never denied their role. Before dealing with Jesus' attitudes towards sacrifices, we must briefly focus on John the Baptizer. The fact that Jesus had been baptized by John implies that they shared some assumptions and expectations. Seemingly, Jesus agreed with the Baptizer's criticism of *Yom ha-kippurim* as an expiatory instrument of individual voluntary sins. Indeed, the purpose of John's baptism was the remission of intentional sins. Clearly, this kind of remission had little to do with the *Yom ha-kippurim* ritual and the killing of victims. According to the Baptizer, the performance of atoning "acts of justice" brought about the forgiveness of sins (*paraitesis amartadon*) by God himself, as well as the purification of the *psyche*, to quote the term of Flavius Josephus.

John's ritual was centered also on immersion in water, which restored *agneia*, purity, to the body. John believed that through inner conversion, public confession and acts of justice, it was possible to obtain forgiveness from God. He probably believed at the same time that some kind of impurity—provoked not by contact with sources of uncleanness, but by moral transgression—still remained in the human body. This is the reason why the body had to be immersed and purified.

In reality, as B.A. Levine (1989) has underlined, the *Yom ha-kippurim* ritual did provide for the purification of the Temple but not for a specific purification of people's bodies. John the Baptizer seems to want to find a remedy for the absence of this ritual of purification of people's body.

In brief, the issues important to John the Baptizer are not only the forgiveness of intentional sins but also the purification of the body. For him, these

two objectives have nothing to do with Temple places and their purification. Whether the Temple was contaminated or not by intentional or inadvertent sins, was a question that had not the slightest influence on the possibility of people to be forgiven and bodily purified.

2.2 *Jesus' Position on the Remission of Sins*

If Jesus distances himself from John the Baptizer, it is because he has his own view on the forgiveness of intentional sins (see Pesce 2001b, 152–154). The Synoptic Gospels contain a series of texts in which Jesus refers to remission as essentially depending on the relation between the sinner, God, and other persons. In Matthew 6:12, one of the invocations of the *Lord's Prayer* says: “forgive (*afes*) us our debts *as* we also have forgiven (*afekamen*) our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). According to Matthew, Jesus comments on this invocation: “If you forgive (*afete*) others their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive (*afesei*) you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14–15) (Gnilka 1986, 232–234). This explanation, which is absent in Luke, is found in a different form in Mark, however: “Whenever you stand praying, forgive (*afiete*), if you have anything against anyone; so that (*ina*) your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses” (Mark 11:25).

In Matthew 6:12 forgiveness previously granted to others, is the *sine qua non* condition for obtaining remission from God. In conclusion, forgiveness is obtained through a trilateral relation between the sinner, his debtors and God, without any expiatory sacrificial act, without any kind of bodily humiliation or decontamination, and without Jesus having a specific function (see Destro – Pesce 1999a, Destro 2001; Pesce 2001b, 154). Actually, Jesus' role in the forgiveness of sins is never mentioned (nor is the expiatory function of his death, or the need for faith in him). Jesus' position not only seems to depart from the *Yom ha-kippurim* ritual (with the associated expiatory function of the emissary goat, fasting and other forms of humiliation), it also seems to indicate a distance from some of John's ideas. In fact, for Jesus, purification of the body through baptism, which John continued to believe necessary, does not appear to be relevant.

2.3 *Jesus and the Temple of Jerusalem*

Jesus' action against the merchants and moneychangers in the Temple is accompanied by the claim that it is a “house of prayer (*proseuche*)” (Mark 11:15–17). Jesus' reaction presupposes that he attached importance to the Temple and defended its dignity and cultic function (see Chilton 1992). In essence, it seems to imply that Jesus did not exclude sacrifices from the cult.

We have evidence that Jesus *explicitly* recognized the sacrifices of the Temple of Jerusalem. In Mark 1:40–44 Jesus tells the leper: “Go and show yourself to the priest, and offer [...] what Moses prescribed” (1:44). Jesus thus orders the purified leper to perform the sacrificial ritual set out in Lev 14:1–32, which prescribes the offerings of a bird, two male lambs and a female lamb. Such offerings correspond to the institutional sacrifices of the *asham*, *hattat* and *olah* type. In addition, it is worth noting that one important provision of the ritual implies that the bird is not sacrificed at the end of the proceedings, but set free. This “sending away” of the bird bears some similarity with the treatment of the emissary goat of the *Yom ha-kippurim*.

In general, these passages show that Jesus accepts most of the sacrificial paradigm of the Temple. We must add that Matthew 5:23–24 implies that Jesus never made any pronouncement against sacrifices:

If when you are bringing your gift to the altar, you suddenly remember that your brother has a grievance against you, leave your gift where it is before the altar. First go and make your peace with your brother, and only then come and offer your gift.

The fact that Jesus never explicitly declared his opposition to sacrifices is demonstrated by three other passages: Matthew 9:13; 12:7 and Mark 12:28–34 (see Pesce 2001b, 160–164). In Matthew 9:13 and 12:7, the quotation from Hosea 6:6 (“I desire mercy, not sacrifice”) is twice attributed to Jesus. Through synoptic comparison it emerges that in both cases the quotation is a redactional addition by Matthew and not a Jesus saying. If Matthew (or the tradition he reflects) quotes the phrase from Hosea, it is because the theme of sacrifice was important to him. There are two possible hypotheses. One is that Matthew, after the destruction of the Temple, tried to find in Jesus’ words or behavior some evidence that would render sacrifices practically useless. Another is that Matthew (or the groups he reflects), *before the destruction of the Temple*, tried to coordinate Jesus’ position on the remission of sins without sacrifices with the sacrificial praxis common to his group.

Finally, there is the passage in Mark 12:28–34 (// Matthew 22:34–40),⁵ stating that observance of the two precepts summarizing the law (love of God and love of others) “is worth more than all whole burnt offerings or sacrifices” (Mark 12:33). Here, too, the exegetical evidence is basic to any interpretation. This sentence, which is absent in Matthew, is redactional, and presupposes that Jesus was not against sacrifices, because Mark attributes it to a scribe and

⁵ See Mazza 2002 on Mark 12:28–34.

not to Jesus. Also in this case, Mark is not aware of any declaration of Jesus against sacrifices.

We have excluded from this analysis texts in which a sacrificial meaning is attributed to Jesus' death, including those of the Last Supper (G. Barth 1992). Even independently of their disputed historicity, they attribute to Jesus a reflection about himself and his death. In no case they explain Jesus' ideas about Jewish sacrifices as such (even though, in some of them, an indirect reference may exist).

2.4 *Jesus and Forgiveness*

Finally, it is necessary to concentrate on forgiveness, the center of Jesus' idea of the remission of sins. The Jubilee of Leviticus, to which Jesus alludes in dealing with the remission of sins (see Destro – Pesce 1999a), should have been immediately preceded by the *Yom ha-kippurim* ritual in the Temple (Lev 25:8). The crucial fact is that John the Baptizer and then Jesus created ritual occasions or instruments for the remission of sin which were far removed from the Temple and were performed without Temple's mediation. But at the same time, they drew their inspiration from Temple's ritual (*Yom ha-kippurim* and the beginning of the Jubilee, for example). This means that their religious ideals remained dialectically connected to the Temple or that they were not totally independent of it.

When dealing with the problem of the historical Jesus' attitude towards sacrifices, we have therefore to bear in mind that the textual evidence presents a complex situation. Conflicting or divergent attitudes and lines of development coexist. Speaking of John the Baptizer and Jesus we have to imagine a transformative process, a passage from a system centered on the Temple, to marginal or peripheral systems, which coexist with the Temple. In order to analyze this process we need to look for an analytical tool that could show the simultaneous presence of dissimilar or dishomogeneous tendencies.

2.5 *Modelling as a Means of Understanding Jesus' Attitude Towards Sacrifices*

An overall view of the process of forming a model may be useful to begin with. F. Affergan states:

Le modèle offre une lecture ou une interprétation indirecte que le langage usuel ne pourrait satisfaire. Le modèle décrit indirectement, par voi métaphorique [...], ce que le langage naturel, par voi référentielle directe, ne pourrait assumer sans doute en raison de la complexité des

événements humains: le vécu, la temporalité, les aspects affectifs, les énonciations, l'utilisation de déictiques [...] L'observable ne l'est qu'à travers la fiction qu'en produit un modèle [...] Le modèle ne copie donc pas; il ne se livre pas non plus à un pâle mimétisme du réel, mais le schématise pour en saisir des formes possibles du monde, ou plutôt des formes de mondes possibles qu'on agence ainsi mais qu'on pourrait agencer autrement. L'essentiel est de bien montrer et par voie de conséquence de bien voir [...] "La pensée retentit dans le voir", nous dit Wittgenstein dans les *Investigations philosophiques* (II § XI). Telle est l'oeuvre que l'ethnologue doit accomplir. De même Pierce aurait vu dans la stratégie du "comme si" une des modalités de son abduction d'hypothèses, selon laquelle une hypothèse ne s'imposerait que si elle donnait une impulsion à une métamorphose de la vision en vertu de laquelle, maintenant, je vois bien une figure, un schéma grâce à cette nouvelle organisation des données (Affergan 1997, 44.61).

When applied to Jesus, or at least to that part of his actions and words that we have taken into consideration, the analysis of the theories of sacrifice examined in the first section of this chapter have a dual effect. On the one hand, some of the features of these theories do not contribute to explain Jesus' attitude. According to the evidence of the gospels, many of the fundamental aspects of sacrifice theories are neither explicitly nor implicitly applicable to Jesus. We refer to the symbolic function of the body of the sacrificial animal (Douglas), to the renunciation-benefit mechanism (Valeri) and to the man-animal substitution of Eilberg-Schwartz. Many of these theories do not apply to Jesus, not even to those passages where Jesus clearly accepted the sacrifices of the Jerusalem Temple (Mark 1:40–44; Matthew 5:23–24; Mark 12:28–34; Matthew 9:13; 12:7).

On the other hand, the theories discussed above are most helpful, insofar as they indicate the singular nature of what Jesus does and says. Some of Malina's theories, in particular, show the link between the sacrificial system and social setting (1993, 1996b, 2001) highlighting the relationship between such system and the organization of time and space (1993, 2001). They enable us to clarify the specific attitude of Jesus toward his culture and understand the religious perspectives he actually followed. From this point of view, Malina's view allows us to see more clearly whether Jesus' behavior marks a separation from the sacrificial model (and to what extent) and whether Jesus' position reveals a departure from those social relations on which sacrificial rituals were thought to be based.

2.6 *Granting Amnesty at the Beginning of a Reign*

If Jesus conceives the remission of sins without reference to the sacrificial device, it is legitimate to reflect on the social framework he had in mind. It is well known that Jesus held the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God as a fundamental perspective. What is important in Jesus' view is that the remission of sins is the first act with which God inaugurates his kingdom. This point evokes some ancient visions of kingship that could have influence in the Land of Israel. Of particular interest, in this sense, is the oriental concept of sovereignty, widespread, as it is known, among for example Egyptian kings, in which the beginning of a new reign was marked by an amnesty. The king embodied justice and his reign had to re-establish justice. The function of the amnesty was to satisfy this requirement. The cancelling of the debts of the poorest represented a temporary suspension of the law (which enforced the payment of debt) with the aim of restoring justice to the weakest (J. Assmann 1992, 53–70). The amnesty expressed the conviction that ideal justice was superior to the mere enforcement of laws.

The *prostagmata philanthropa*, for example, was often proclaimed by the Ptolemaic kings in the second century BCE at the inauguration of their reign (cf. Lenger 1980). Such dispositions consisted of an amnesty that was intended to annul fiscal obligations, especially payment of debts. In terms of this legal custom, a person was allowed to retain his land and work it, instead of selling it to pay his debts. Such amnesties evidently helped indigent people, who were the most heavily indebted. An important consequence of this form of remission was that it actually by-passed the bureaucratic class, which was entitled to deal with fiscal crimes, thereby creating a direct relation between king and subjects.

Our hypothesis is that Jesus envisaged an image of the God of Israel similar to the image of an oriental sovereign who, at the beginning of his reign, granted an amnesty to his subjects and re-established justice by suspending laws. This interpretation may contextualize Jesus' view in the culture of his time and reveal important social relations that are implicit in the process of remission.⁶ It should be pointed out that the *prostagmata philanthropa* above all addressed crimes against the king. Jesus, on his part, seems to universalize remission, which affords a different meaning to normal interpersonal relationships.

Of most relevance to our discussion is the fact that, in referring to the ideal image of God-king, Jesus utilized a typical figure of the "religions of the Temple." He, however, reshaped it profoundly and detached it from the Jerusalem Temple (even if, as we have said, the detachment was not total). In

6 On this see now also Bazzana 2015.

this conceptualization, God's action is intended not only to guarantee hereditary or acquired roles, but also to overturn the *status quo* with the aim of establishing equity and justice. All that transcends the patron-client scheme. In fact, as mentioned above, Malina (1996) observed how already in Leviticus an evolution of the figure of God had taken place. This transition may be read in conjunction with a vision that abandoned the patronage ideal and, at the same time, adopted a political notion of religion.

From the gospels, it becomes clear that Jesus idealized the relationship between the king and his subjects. Fundamentally, he envisaged that, after an amnesty was granted by the God-king, a process of forgiveness from one person to another had to follow. This is an element totally absent in the mechanism of the oriental amnesty. For Jesus, it is this type of action by the sovereign towards his subjects (and by one person towards another) that assures people freedom and life. In this, he transfigured the social model he was using as a reference.

Another regime of relationships between God and people emerges in Jesus. Access to God or to the sovereign is direct. The God-king interacts with his subjects, without the mediation of elite or official functionaries. The law, defended by the bureaucratic classes, is suspended in the name of justice, which is held and given only by God or the sovereign (J. Assmann, 1992).

In other words, amnesty, the typical royal decree inaugurating a reign, in Jesus' view, is accompanied by the need for an expanded *forgiveness* system, a sort of *chain-reaction* (cf Matthew 6:12.14; 18:25–35) (see Destro – Pesce 1999a) that goes back to the Jubilee notion of *afesis*.⁷ As indicated, by looking back at a procedure that had its beginnings in the Temple, Jesus makes people interact with each other, without intermediary (elites, priests, bureaucracy). Jesus seems to rely on a model of social reconstitution or return to an original state of parity or equality, to the utopia of the Leviticus Jubilee.

Indeed, Jesus has the idea of a “conditioned remission” that reactivates life and brings about vital effects. Renouncing one's rights and forgiving neighbors enables people to escape God's imminent last judgment, and therefore death. Jesus envisages (a) that the Kingdom of God is coming; (b) that in such kingdom transgressions will be punished with destruction, *gehinnom*. It is because there are no sacrifices for the expiation of intentional sins that, at the start of the Kingdom of God, an amnesty should take place, allowing people to escape condemnation.

7 The word *afesis* translates the Hebrew *deror*. It means the act of setting free, for example, those who have been reduced to slavery due to debt (Destro – Pesce 1999a).

It is worth noting that in Matthew 5:23–24 the sacrificial offering that Jesus requires should occur *after* the reparation-reconciliation. The sacrifice corresponds to the solemn conclusion and social testimony of the resolution of conflicts. For this reason, the offering is the sign of what has previously occurred and *not* the instrument of transformation of the negative into the positive. Where the principle of forgiveness intervenes, the abolition or suspension of the principle of reciprocity (renunciation/benefit) also intervenes. It is not necessary to give in order to obtain. The relation “to be forgiven”/“to forgive others” substitutes the relation “to offer”/ “to receive”.

2.7 *Jesus Transforms and Relocate Elements of Temple's Religion*

A theory of religions that takes into account the factors of space and location may be useful to clarify Jesus' position. We briefly remind that J.Z. Smith (2004) has proposed a classification of ancient/classical and late antique religions in three forms: the religions of “here”, or domestic religions; the religions of “there”, or public, civic and state religions; the religions of “anywhere”, “that occupy an interstitial space between these other two loci”. The third category includes a “variety of religious entrepreneurs, from groups (called associations) to activities (called magic)”. Smith argues for “the expansion and relative prominence of the third locus (the religion of ‘anywhere’) in late antiquity” (2004, 325). He believes the diffusion of the religions of “anywhere” occurs through “reconfigurations and reinterpretations of elements characteristic of the religions of ‘here’ and ‘there’” (2004, 332). These reconfigurations are not formed entirely independently, but in concomitance with the other two religious forms.

Smith gives a series of examples of these reconfigurations of elements coming from the other two religious models. Three factors contributed to the birth of the religion of “anywhere”: “a new geography, a new cosmography, and a new polity” (Smith, 2004, 330–334). The response to the new geography was: “the association as a socially constructed replacement for the family” (2004, 330). The response to the new cosmography was a devaluing of ritual sacrifices and a greater preference for religious experiences allowing the “transcendence of earth, both as an experience and as a source of knowledge” (2000, 331). The answer to the new polity meant that “the old forms of kingship became idealized objects of nostalgia, as in messianism” (2000, 332).

Smith's classification clarifies many aspects of Jesus' religion, which can be identified as typical of the religions of “anywhere.” Jesus is a wandering religious leader and is linked to religious forms that have in common the fact of not being linked to a “particular place.” Jesus can be classified as one of the “religious practitioners not officially recognized by centers of power” (2004, 330). He is nevertheless capable, as an entrepreneur of an interstitial religious

form, of weakening the power of these centers. In fact, following Smith's model, the religious practitioners of the religion of the anywhere "at times [...] may imitate, at other times [...] may reverse, aspects of [the] two other dominant forms of religion" (the domestic one and the religion of the temple) (2004, 330).

As far as the "new geography" is concerned, it should be noted that the organization of Jesus' movement is determined by discipleship,⁸ a specific socio-religious form that can be classed as what Smith calls an "association". It is a social form, occupying an intermediary position between the family and the temple. This type of association can be understood as a "replacement" of the family, a "fictive kinship," one that may enter into conflict with the real family. In the various early-Christian groups, the discipleship-family relation is actually arranged in very different ways, precisely because of the interstitial character of such kind of association. On the other hand, neither the Temple, nor the family are substituted.

As far as the "new cosmography" is concerned, the sacrifices in the Temple continue to be accepted by Jesus, although they are not the most suitable means of achieving the essential relationship with God. They are not the instruments required to obtain the forgiveness of sins. Beside the ritual action in the Temple, which Jesus continues to recognize as a place where God is present, a direct contact with God is needed. This can be obtained through revelation, as in the cases of John's baptism, through prayer or the practice of exorcism, and also through extraordinary experiences of contact with the supernatural⁹ as in the case of the so-called "transfiguration".

As far as the "new polity" is concerned, Jesus seems to refer to an ideal of God that appears to be rooted in "nostalgia" for a king who takes possession of his kingdom, and who takes the whole of Israel's society back to an original condition of justice and equality.

In conclusion, we may note how the position of Jesus seems to recalibrate categories and ideals. Apparently, Jesus transforms and relocates basic aspects of the religion of the Temple. He modifies fundamental elements, especially with regard to time and space. Two of the most expressive and symbolically influential aspects of the remission of sins are fused together by Jesus. In his view, the forgiveness of sins and a new beginning of people's lives brought about by the Jubilee can happen *anywhere* (not only in the Temple) and at *any time* (not only once a year during *Yom ha-kippurim*).

8 See Chapter One § 2 and Chapter 3.

9 See Chapter 6.

Kinship and Movement: Closeness and Distance in John's Perspective

It is widely held that Jesus put in radical opposition discipleship, which was the structuring principle of his movement (Theissen 1977.1979; Pesce 1982), and obedience to the duties of the domestic group.¹ This orientation has also found its way into anthropological studies (Goody 1983, 87) that, in relation to Jesus' movement, focus on the relation between discipleship and kinship, the two basic Jewish-Palestinian forms of social organization.²

The radical opposition between kinship and discipleship is however present in the Synoptics but is absent in the fourth Gospel,³ which underlines the ties that links Jesus to his mother and brothers and gives importance to their reciprocal closeness.⁴

Our intention here is not to reconstruct the historical Jesus, but to deal with the cultural and social imagination of John's Gospel. Actually, the fourth Gospel permits the access to the social situation of its author, through which Jesus' experience was reimagined and reinterpreted. Thanks to this Gospel, we have evidence of a discontinuity of the Johannine group of Jesus' followers with the historical Jesus' movement.

1 In this chapter, we publish the revision of "Kinship, Discipleship, and Movement. An Anthropological Study of the Gospel of John", *Biblical Interpretation* 3/3 (1995) 266–284. Different drafts of this paper were presented at the Departments of Religious Studies of Yale University and Brown University (1992) and in Selçuk at an interdisciplinary conference (1993). We would like to thank Wayne Meeks, Paolo Valesio, Stanley Stowers and Francesca Cocchini for their observations.

2 The metaphorical use of kinship language (God as "father", believers as "sons" of God, disciples as "brothers") is outside our purpose here because it refers to non-biological kinship.

3 About John's literary history cf. R.E. Brown 1966, xli–li; Boismard 1987, 1993; Ashton 1992, 199–204; Anderson 2006; Anderson – Just – Thatcher (eds), 2007.

4 On kinship's role in early Christianity, see Stauffer 1952, cf. Bauckham 1990 (on John, 52–53) and van Tilborg 1993 which, however, are not concerned with the anthropological relations between kinship, discipleship and movement.

1 Tension Between Kinship Identity and Religious Identification (John 1:35–51)

The adherence of the first disciples to Jesus is represented in John 1:35–51. Before 1:35, John does not attribute any role to kinship in the identification of Jesus. The prologue defines the theological identity of Jesus. Afterwards, the Baptizer describes him as “the lamb of God” (1:35). After having called him “rabbi” (1:37), the first two disciples already recognize him as the “Messiah” (1:41). Only later does John put into Philip’s mouth the words that identify the Messiah Jesus from a more clearly social point of view: “Jesus, the son of Joseph, of Nazareth” (1:45). Philip’s declaration gives Nathanael the chance to make clear that the socio-familial identity cannot provide the key to Jesus’ religious identity. It leads Nathanael to deny that he could be the Messiah:⁵ “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” (1:45).

At the beginning of John’s Gospel, instead of a patrilineal genealogy, like that of Matthew, there is a theological affirmation of the pre-existence of the Son (1:1–3) and the recognition of the failure of the world to recognize him. Other passages in 1:35–51 are useful to clarify the Gospel’s implicit conception of kin membership in relation to discipleship. In substance, in John, kinship identity is inadequate for knowing Jesus’ nature and is never the legitimating frame of his religious profile. For what regards Jesus’ followers, however, John’s approach is different.

Simon is first identified through a declaration of his direct patrilineal descent: “you are Simon the son of John”. However, his condition is changed by Jesus’ decision: “you shall be called Cephas, which is rendered Peter” (1:42). Simon’s true identity is hereby assigned by Jesus, although the family name does not disappear, because Simon in the same context is referred to as Simon Peter (1:40).⁶ The two ways of naming, the one by means of kinship and the other through discipleship, may coexist without excluding each other. Kinship identity is overtaken by the religious one, but it does not annul it; it functionally combines with it. Andrew’s identity is established through the head of the group of disciples (“Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother”, 1:40) and not through his own family’s head. His kin relationship is no longer in the forefront, but he is

5 John 1:45 has nothing to do with the virgin’s birth (against de la Potterie, 1988, 113: “not Joseph, but God is his father”). Nathaniel doubts that Jesus is the Messiah because of his local origin and not on the grounds of lineage.

6 In 21:15, 16, 17 Jesus uses the kin name “Simon of John”, but the narrator refers to Simon as “Simon Peter” (21:15) or “Peter” (21:17, 20, 21), without kin reference.

still defined as a sibling of an important Jesus' follower. The fact that the kinship definition does not have exclusiveness or priority in the religious field, is also clear because Philip, Nathanael and an unnamed disciple are in no way defined through kinship. In the emblematic case of Nathanael (1:46–51), the final identification is given by the words of the movement's leader: "Here is a true Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile!" (1:47).

To sum up, the kinship ties of the disciples do not primarily determine the internal structure of the followers' group, even though often they do have a role in it. The logic of discipleship and the logic of kinship terminology and politics cross each other. The leading criterion that structures the movement seems to be that of discipleship and not that of kinship.

The way in which John's Gospel adopts the criteria of kinship identification and geographical ones ("from Bethsaida", 1:44; "from Nazareth", 1:45–46;) may be helpful for arriving at more significant observations. Many times in this Gospel it is stressed that knowing Jesus' family does not mean knowing him. However faced by astonishing statements such as "I am the bread that came down from heaven" (6:41), Jesus' audience calls on social parameters that identify a person chiefly on the basis of primary kinship ties: "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" (6:42). John knows that the kinship identification is essential for Jewish-Palestinian culture and cannot fail to put cultural denominations into the mouth of Jesus' questioners. Also in 7:28, "You know me, and you know where I am from", John emphasizes how parental and geographical references are inadequate in identifying the true nature of Jesus. It is precisely by denying their religious importance that John reveals his awareness of social criteria that lead to a satisfactory identification.

As we have seen, in the Gospel of John, Jesus' identity and his function of salvation are not mediated, nor even defined, by kinship or geographical origin. Likewise, the disciples' participation in the movement is represented as independent from kinship or other social positions. Nonetheless, from the outset, John is challenged by the problem of an inescapable relationship between disciple membership, typical of Jesus' group, and other forms of membership. This is clearly evident whenever John attributes value and/or historical truth to elements of kinship and speaks of "brother of Simon Peter", "son of John", "son of Joseph", etc.

The interconnection between socio-cultural features, historical data and theological conceptions is not fortuitous in John, but is rendered necessary by the dramatic structure of the Gospel. The drama represented is that Jesus, the Logos that became flesh, is not recognized by his own (1:11). It is because those that John calls "his own" use the normal socio-cultural and religious categories of identification that they do not recognize him. The drama of the non-recognition

or “misunderstanding” (Iacopino 1988, 165–166) lies precisely in the dialectic between the necessity of sociological identifications and their inadequacy. A symbolic interpretation of the fourth Gospel cannot therefore ignore the literal meaning of its socio-cultural affirmations and their implicit influence.

We conclude that the socio-cultural categories are in evidence in John's narration because they are essential to the dramatic non-recognition of Jesus, but are interpreted as misleading criteria for his religious identification and legitimization.

2 Relatives and Disciples at the Wedding of Cana (2:1–5.11)

The Gospel of John places Jesus' first “manifestation” at a wedding feast, a kind of social setting in which a family ritually represents and reinforces its ties with the social segments of which it is part.⁷ The kinship categories are situated in the forefront by the statement “and the mother of Jesus was there” (2:1). She is not called by her name (and, in fact, never is in John), but is socially classified through an usual kinship category as “mother of”.⁸ The fact that in John's narrative the person of Jesus is tied to that of his mother places him within a kinship network, in a social situation qualified by consanguinity. It is unequivocally true that kinship closely relates mother and son and connects their respective backgrounds and their relational contexts.

Jesus' mother is mentioned first and seems to be the one invited first. Jesus is named second and seems to have been invited inasmuch as his mother has been. He moves in a social context close to that of his mother, where his brothers⁹ are probably also present (see 2:12).¹⁰ The group of disciples seems to live easily together within the social environment organized on kinship and

7 On ‘human’ mediations in Luke, see Bovon (1974b, 63–66) who underlines “la rupture nécessaire” of family ties.

8 De la Potterie 1988, 95 claims that in John the name's absence has a symbolic meaning: “she is the Mother of He who is the Son of God, the Mother of the incarnated Word”. Likewise Ghiberti, 1989, 122. However, theological interpretations cannot overlook the social meaning embedded in the literal sense: Jesus is invited as son of his mother.

9 “Brothers” (*adelfoi*) is John terminology. Whether they are sons of a previous wife of Joseph, Jesus' cousins, or Joseph's and Mary's sons (cf. Blinzler 1967; Oberlinner 1975, 48–49.120–135; Bauckham 1990, 19–32) is irrelevant. Whatever the case, they are close kin of Jesus. We intentionally ignore uncertain reference to kinship (cf. 20:17) and sedentary followers (11:1–16). Kilpatrick's list (1982, 16) of “family occasions” on Passover is not totally plausible.

10 See also, Schnackenburg (1965 ad locum) on 2:1–2.

expressed in the celebration of a wedding. In John's mind this implies the validation of basic social values and a rather easy integration of the nascent movement. In comparison to 1:35–51, in 2:1–12 a broader setting is constructed for the social and religious location of Jesus.

The mother assumes a prominent part in this scene. She tells the servants: “do whatever he tells you”. She is the one who offers social mediation to Jesus. The mother's order to the servants, despite Jesus' apparent initial denial, indicates her autonomous position. It marks, furthermore, a role of authority towards the son.¹¹

At Cana it is extremely important to note the father's absence¹² from the family gathering. The father does not seem to have a social-religious apex function, or to play an active role.¹³ John actually presents a matrifocal family group, where the mother seemingly surrogates the father. Without entering into this last issue, we must note that she occupies a special place of responsibility or guidance with respect to Jesus and other blood relatives.

The father's absence can historically be attributed to natural or voluntary causes. Whether John thinks the father is alive or dead does not really matter.¹⁴ What matters is that this absence is supposed by the entire Gospel as well as by the Synoptics. The same absence concerns some disciples' fathers, who are known but never appear, whereas their mothers are shown to be active and engaged.¹⁵ The absence of fathers from Jesus' movement proves to be a systemic element. In the Jewish-Palestinian culture, the authority structure of the patricentric family does not easily allow the father to be a disciple of his son or at the same level as him.¹⁶ Secondly, the role of the fathers in domestic

11 “Do whatever he tells you” does not imply the mother's, but the waiters' submission to Jesus: their obedience is mediated by the mother's credibility.

12 See Chapter 1 §3.

13 6:42 “seems to imply that Jesus' father is still alive” (R.E. Brown 1978, 198).

14 Widow or not, the mother is never defined as “Mary of Joseph”. The social condition of a widow was probably enhanced if she assumed a religious role (cf. Derrett 1973, 34).

15 Disciples' fathers are named in the four Gospels only to qualify their sons (cf. John 1:42; Luke 6:16; Mark 3:18; Mark 2:14). Zebedee, father of James and John, is not active (Mark 3:17) but his wife is. She, like “Mary, mother of James the younger and Joses” (Mark 15:40; Matthew 27:55–56), is not defined in relation to her husband, but to her sons. In the Synoptics, Jesus asks his disciples for a clear detachment from family, jobs and goods (John omits this request). The same detachment involves the mothers. However, some of them (Zebedee's wife, the alleged wife of Alphaeus, and Jesus' mother) are somehow present.

16 If the absence of Jesus' father may be explained by theologians through Jesus' divine filiation, this explanation does not apply to the disciples. In addition, van Tilborg's (1993, 245)

administration frequently implied a sedentary male occupation, not compatible with the activities of the movement.

It must be pointed out, however, that the absence of fathers does not invalidate family structures. It merely shifts their internal coordinates: the lack of a male apex within the kin structure facilitates, for example, the emergence of a bond between mother and sons (see 2:12). Also elsewhere in early-Christian texts, the mother sometimes appears with her sons, as in Mark 3:31–3, in the Gospel of the Nazarenes and in Acts 1:14.

To sum up, Jesus is depicted as isolated from his male ancestors, the most important group in ordinary social organization. He is related to the less prominent agents of the *oikos*: mother and brothers.

In John's view, the wedding at Cana is a theatre for other important identifications. The form of address "woman" (2:4) may evidence Jesus' social independence from his mother role or kin influence. Leading a group of faithful followers, he wishes to eschew the usual kinship subordination, according to which—in the absence of the father and of the agnatic group—the mother may acquire a more influential position. Seemingly, when he uses the term woman, he does not feel obliged to support his mother in her authority or social prestige within the *oikos*, an obligation that would fall to him as (eldest) son of a woman on her own. The counter-posing of "mother" and "woman" is intentional: John makes Jesus use "woman" in a context dominated by the maternal function, where the first term would be more appropriate. Notwithstanding that, in the same section, references to "mother of Jesus" or "his mother" are used four times (2:1.3.5.12).

However, since "woman" is employed in John by Jesus also when he addresses the Samaritan (4:21), the adulteress (of the later-included section of 7:59–8:11), and Mary of Magdala (20:13.15), this appellative does not entail an exclusive designation of his mother. It is more convenient to see it as a way of associating her with other women. For the author of this Gospel, it defines the representatives of the femal gender. For this reason "woman", applied to the mother, should not be interpreted as having a unique symbolic meaning.

The expression, preceding the vocative "woman", "what to me and to you", which we take to mean "this is not my concern",¹⁷ in any case underlines a

psychological explanation (the father's absence is an element of "the typical model of a family which tends to produce [...] a homosexual son" has overlooked the fact that the fathers' absence is a general and systemic element in the social form of Jesus' discipleship.

17 The sentence is notoriously difficult to translate, cf. R.E. Brown 1966, 99.

certain distance that Jesus establishes.¹⁸ Whatever its meaning may be, Johns' sentence radicalizes the difference between Jesus and his mother, thus clarifying the autonomous nature of his mission. The contrast is placed symptomatically at the beginning of Jesus' public life. The fact that John needs to emphasize Jesus' autonomy from the start shows how sensitive he was to the relation connecting the mother to Jesus' group of disciples.

The contrast with the mother takes place in the miracle context that consolidates Jesus' group: after the conversion of the water into wine, a clear change occurs. The disciples begin to believe in him, having witnessed his glory.¹⁹ The intensified aggregation of the disciples marks a turning point in Jesus' life. Thereafter a new relationship between kinship and discipleship is created. The strengthening of the disciples around Jesus assigns an unusual role to kinship, because it is challenged by the new perspectives and expectations of discipleship.

Anthropological studies have demonstrated that the beginning of a new activity means a change in habits, mentality and relationships, normally accompanied by a separation from the family environment or from the group of origin, whatever that may have been.²⁰ Every moment of cultural, religious or political growth entails abandoning contexts and people of everyday life, with the idea of freeing new cultural forms and new energies. The separation finalizes the start of a better existence, in which the people from whom the separation takes place will be later met in a different relation.

Actually, in the mind of John, a real dissociation on the part of Jesus does not occur. Despite Jesus' disengaging words at Cana the mother is shown to be associated with him and his disciples in the trip to Capernaum.²¹ She is presented in the context of Jesus' religious activity and in a town that, in this Gospel, plays a particular role (4:46; 6:17, 24; 6:59). The end of the scene (2:12) leaves Jesus and his mother united at Capernaum. To judge from the text, if a physical separation had to happen, it could have taken place only after

18 Against Schüssler Fiorenza (1983, 327), we take her as mother, not as disciple. Schüssler Fiorenza leans on her interpretation because she takes "disciple" in the sense of "believer" and not as "itinerant and preaching follower".

19 Cf. Schnackenburg (1965 ad locum) to 2:2.

20 The separation from an earlier environment is a preliminary rite of passage (cf. Van Gennep 1909). The abandonment of the domestic milieu, of the mother, or the suspension of normal socio-familial life are steps towards the attainment of a new level in life.

21 A minority reading of the textual tradition reads "he stayed" and not "they stayed" cf. Aland, *The Greek New Testament. Third Edition*, ad loc.

Capernaum, since they stayed there “not many days” (2:12). The text says nothing of a supposed separation. The mother only reappears at the cross.

3 The Presence of Jesus’ Relatives in the Group of Disciples at Capernaum (2:12)

In verse 2:12, John describes a group of extraordinary interest to our research. The various members (Jesus, mother, brothers, disciples) seem to make up a unit. If the order of appearance is the order of importance, the mother, who is followed immediately by Jesus’ brothers,²² seems to have pre-eminence within the kinship and social context. The disciples follow last. Their appearance in the last place may depend on editing modifications of the hypothetical pre-Johannine text (which had not mentioned their presence).²³ Whatever the case, it is evident that John did not believe the disciples should be assigned a more important position in the group. Between the four components of the group distances exist and are highlighted, but are not presented in terms of a true opposition. A social formation emerges in which discipleship takes its first steps within, or alongside, a group of blood relatives.

In the social imagination of John, the presence of the mother near Jesus at Cana and Capernaum creates a particular social scenario. The mother plays the role of head of the family unit. Since the brothers are also present,²⁴ it is the whole kinship nucleus without the father (about whom there is no information) that abandons ordinary life. It is not only Jesus, as a religious leader who dissociates from the world he comes from. Moreover, referring to the same person as “mother,” (2:1.3.5), as well as “woman” (2:4), John aggregates both to Jesus. The mother as woman may carry with her extra-kinship status and

22 The brothers’ names are ignored not because “the four brothers had no (longer) a great importance” (Blinzler 1974, 93; cf. Schnackenburg 1971 on 7:3), but because John envisages them as a group in the early church (cf. 1 Cor 9:6; Acts 1:14 and John 19:27).

23 Boismard 1993 11, 325 claims that the verse 2:2 in the “pre-Johannine Gospel” read: *ên de kai ê meter tou Iêsou ekei kai oi adelfoi autou*, whereas in verse 2:12 any mention of the disciples was absent. We note the disciples’ absence also in *Ep. Apost.* 5 (“Thereafter was there a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and they bade him with his mother and his brethren, and he changed water into wine”). On the Christology of the *Epistola Apostolorum* see Norelli 2012.

24 John imagines them present from 2:1. He usually names only at the end those who are present from the beginning (about the rare reading “brothers” in 2:2 cf. Blinzler 1967, 27–28). If they are present only at the departure from Cana (cf. Schnackenburg 1971 on 2:12), this is a further reason to maintain that, for John, they were part of Jesus’ movement.

relations. Equally, other profoundly heterogeneous components are related to each other. This is the case of the group of brothers (a standard strong associative kinship aggregate) that is connected to that of the disciples (an innovating religious association).

It could seem from 2:12 that inside the movement the brothers form a unique group with the mother.²⁵ They appear, by contrast, as an autonomous group and almost in opposition to the disciples in 7:3–10, and are absent when the mother is at the foot of the cross. It is therefore possible that in John's view they constitute an independent circle or a section within the movement.

The same verse 2:12 assumes extraordinary importance if compared to the Synoptic Gospels that present an open conflict between the mother and brothers, on one side, and Jesus and those that listen to him, on the other (cf. Mark 3:31–35). John knows no conflict of this kind between Jesus and his mother.²⁶ The activity of Jesus does not result in the formation of a group separate from the rest of society, since it admits the participation of mother and brothers.²⁷

The social aggregate imagined by John could presuppose or reflect the idea of mothers' and/or brothers' presence in the post-Jesus movement immediately after the crucifixion (Acts 1:14;²⁸ Galatians 1:19; 1 Cor 9:5) better than the Synoptic Gospels are able to do.

4 The Role of the Brothers (7:2–10)

In chapter 7 (2–10) the implicit sociological imagination is the same as that which is explicitly outlined in 2:12. The itinerant group is composed of Jesus, his disciples and his brothers. However, the latter maintain their own autonomous characterization. Their way of thinking, presupposed by John, tends to mediate between kin exigences and criteria governing discipleship.

The entire text of 7:2–10 offers the chance to clarify the way in which John's Gospel imagines the position of the brothers with respect to the disciples. The former appear as a homogeneous group, separate from the mother, who

25 There is no hint in 2:12 that Jesus accomplished a deliberate act of separation from his family in Capernaum (against R.E. Brown, 1978, 196; see also Ruether, 1977, 37).

26 See also, Kilpatrick 1982, 16–17. Equally, Bauckham 1990, 52: "If Matthew and Mark gave the impression of a complete rift [...] John alone [...] presents a more complex picture".

27 See also, Bauckham 1990, 52: "at the beginning of the Galilean ministry, Jesus' mother and brothers are closely associated with Jesus and his disciples (2:1–2:12)".

28 Against Morris 1969, 250, Acts 1:14 considers Mary's and the brothers' presence in the movement after Jesus' death as normal. Cf. Bauckham 1990, 9.

actually is not present. They seem to be very interested in what Jesus is likely to do, and concerned with the response of the disciples to him. They, however, maintain a clear distance from the disciples: speaking to Jesus, they call them, “your” (7:3) disciples.

John shows the brothers attempting to suggest to Jesus that he should achieve religious success during the feast of Sukkot, one of the main occasions of socio-religious aggregation in Jewish-Palestinian society. They advise: “no one does anything in secret, if he wants to be in the public eye. If you do these things, show yourself to the world” (7:4). Their attitude is typical of kinship, not of discipleship. Only a relative—thanks to his unquestionable ties of loyalty and authority—may advise and almost orientate Jesus’ activity. In John, the disciples are not attributed such an active attitude.

The author of the last redaction of the Gospel, seems to assume that the brothers are part of the movement. He imagines that they are following Jesus’ itinerant preaching in Galilee and stay loyal to him during his hiding in this area. The fact that they can plan a pilgrimage with Jesus²⁹ implies that they are or may be involved in his activity. They seem to know about the withdrawal of the disciples (cf. 6:66) and actually urge Jesus to act in public in order to revive their faith (“so that your disciples also may see the works that you are doing”, 7:5). In this context, the phrase in 7:5, “for neither did his brothers believe in him,” would represent a crescendo of disorientation that is penetrating ever deeper into Jesus’ group. In fact, first the disciples and then the brothers desert Jesus,³⁰ leaving only the Twelve with him (except one, cf. 6:70).

Jesus’ decision to go secretly on his own on the pilgrimage is clearly an act of dissociation from the brothers’ group that John wants to underline. A question arises here as to whether John wishes to present the separation from the brothers as a structural necessity. Since the episode is placed in close relation to the particular moment of the Galilean withdrawal, John seems to favor the hypothesis of a contingent fracture. The separation does not depend on the incompatibility between kinship and discipleship,³¹ rather on the critical situation Jesus is living through.

In John’s Gospel the group of disciples and the group of brothers are independent in their relation with Jesus. Neither of the two groups mediates the

29 Against Schnackenburg 1971, *ad locum* on 7:3.

30 The reference to Jesus’ brothers might be important because “by the end of the Century, James, “the brother of the Lord” had become the hero of Jewish Christians” (R.E. Brown 1984, 105); cf. also R.E. Brown 1979, 75–76.89.

31 The detachment of Jesus from the brothers is not even presented in order to develop his independent personality, already clearly delineated.

relation of the other with him. But, as previously mentioned, the brothers would like to influence the relation the disciples have with Jesus. From this point of view the brothers appear to be, in this moment, more active and influential than the disciples.³²

It seems that, in the vision of John, at a time when the voluntary association of discipleship seems to be weakening, the indestructible social form of kinship comes to the fore. Actually, in the moment of the Galilean retreat, it is not the disciples (save the Twelve 6:67–70), but the brothers who are close to Jesus and advise him. However, John judges their advice as lack of faith. In this condition, kinship constitutes the most solid ground, but still proves unable to supply religious support and solid identity.

5 The Presence of the Mother in the Movement at Jesus' Death (19:25–27)

The social context imagined by John at the foot of the cross is principally constituted by female figures.³³ In contrast to the Synoptics, however, the first two women named are matrilateral kin, that is, the mother and the mother's sister. Joseph is absent, as is the husband of Jesus' mother's sister. Jesus' brothers are not mentioned. There are no traces of friends or disciples, except the Beloved. There is also no mention of the agnates of Jesus' mother, whom she may share with her sister.

The mother of Jesus is grouped with a blood sister. Both are in the similar situation, from the social structural and kinship point of view. Left to face a drama on their own, they turn to their female network of support. This is a revealing and relatively anomalous symptom in a patricentric society, where the immediate and more solid aggregation is framed by fathers and brothers. Remarkably similar, the two sisters help to underline the matrilaterality and female character of Jesus' kinship. The only patrilateral element could be introduced by another woman,³⁴ Mary of Clopas, if we understand Clopas

32 Since kinship themes are present in 2:1–11.12; 7:1–11; 19:25–27, we disagree with the idea of John's progressive loss of interest in the brothers as kin (against Ghiberti 1989, 111).

33 In 19:25–27 we meet a biological mother, her son and her sister. It is not the metaphorical use of language that interests us, but the social role embodied in Mary as mother.

34 The text's structure presents a parallel between two unnamed kinswomen, followed by two Marys named through a genitive, cf. Schnackenburg, *ad loc.*; Bauckham 1990, 9–11. Against Blinzler 1967, 111–113.

(according to Hegesippus³⁵) to be a brother of Joseph, Jesus' father. The patrilineal element, however, is still embodied in a woman. In this case the kinswomen of Jesus should be three instead of two.

At the cross, the people of the family are qualified only by kinship. John omits their proper names. The omission is substituted by the use of kinship definitions (sister of the mother, mother of Jesus).³⁶ Names are remembered, however, in the case of the other two women. Mary of Clopas, in any case, is identified by a male of the family, whether he be father, husband, brother or son (in no case a member of Jesus' movement).³⁷ Mary of Magdala is simply defined by the name of a place: there is not even the slightest reference to the kinship group she belongs to. To name only women means to name that part of the kinship system that does not help to emphasize or represent the parental group. It entails covering up the male side, hiding it away, giving it neither active nor passive identity.

Ultimately, the absence of the family's males allows one to hypothesize that, for John, they are irrelevant to the story and to the social situation of Jesus' group. All the attention of the author concentrates on the closeness to Jesus of specific female kinship circles attracted by his movement.

John places Jesus' female kinship environment in the forefront at the start of the drama of the crucifixion. John differs from the Synoptics (Mark 15:40–41; cf. Matthew 27:35–36; Luke 23:49) because he anticipates the presence of the bystanders at the foot of the cross when Jesus is still alive. There are two addressees of Jesus' last words, unknown to the Synoptics, the mother and the beloved disciple. The other three women could perhaps assume the function of witnesses and transmitters.

Since John places the mother and the beloved disciple together, he seems to assume that the disciple was with the women before the crucifixion. The function that John attributes to the disciple in relation to Jesus' mother could be in continuity with the link he already had with the group of women, inside the movement.

35 Eusebius, HE 3,11;3, 32,6; 4,22,4. Cf. Blinzler 1967, 94–110.117–118. Cf. Oberlinner 1975, 120–125.

36 Cf. McArthur 1973, 38–47.

37 If the *Klópa* of 19:25 were Joseph's brother and a disciple, it could be an exception to our thesis of the absence of the fathers in Jesus' movement. But this possibility is based on suppositions external to John: Luke 24:18 (*Kleopa*) and Hegesippus' information. It is not plausible that Luke would speak of Jesus' father's brother simply as a disciple, without mentioning his kin relationship. In addition, the inclusion of a man's name in the appellation of a woman of Jesus' movement does not imply that such a man would also be a member of the group (against Bauckham 1990, 52).

At the cross, the kinship context seems to be suddenly cast aside by Jesus who turns to his mother using the term “woman” (as in 2:4). Jesus does not pay attention to the kin role of the mother as such, and seems to emphasize her position in the movement.³⁸ Nevertheless, in 19:26, Jesus will re-utilize the kinship meaning of “mother” and “son”. Actually, the person he calls “woman” is appointed as “mother” of the disciple. John’s Jesus offers her a “son” and stresses her maternity. To the disciple he gives a mother, likening him to a descendant, a son: he becomes guardian of such a mother, taking her *eis ta idia* (“unto his own [home]”) (19:27). In the very moment when mother and disciple are given support, John’s Jesus falls back on the idiom and the imperative rules of kinship descent and parental solidarity.

According to John, Jesus seems to want his own history as son to be repeated by the disciple. Precisely because the beloved disciple takes the place of Jesus as son, the words on the cross may presuppose that Jesus has been as son continuously beside his mother. In other words, the mother in the imagination of the fourth Gospel may have been present in the movement right up to the cross.³⁹

The familial terminology has no metaphorical aim: becoming son of Jesus’ mother implies practical consequences for the disciple. He has to take care of her in his own social setting. Neither is the location of the mother in the house (*eis ta idia*) of the beloved disciple a metaphor, since it seems to entail material aid, social closeness, or even common residence.

Jesus’ last words on the cross apparently reflect John’s concern for finding a legitimating criterion for the presence of the mother with Jesus’ movement after his death. The mother is not a disciple, if by disciple we mean an itinerant, whose functions include preaching. When she can no longer depend on Jesus, her material and symbolic position seems guaranteed by the fact of becoming mother to the beloved disciple, and being placed in his group. Through a *sui generis* kinship relation (between a woman/mother and a disciple/son) to the Jesus’ movement is thus assured the continuation of a maternal presence, through the mother of Jesus.

The position offered to the beloved disciple places him in an absolutely privileged position after the death of the leader. Moreover the mother acquires a role among the disciples and within the movement as a whole, being taken

38 The symbolic interpretation in the light of Gen 2–3 and Rev 12 neglects that “woman” is normally used in the Gospel not only for Jesus’ mother. “19:26 reflects rather that the distance indicated in 2:4 is still maintained” (Seim 1987, 60).

39 Against Seim, 63, we have no hint of a split that was resolved at the cross.

(on Jesus' authority) *eis ta idia* by an exceptional disciple.⁴⁰ An entity is made up of "the beloved disciple" as son and the "woman" as mother. Thereby, the mother-son relationship acquires a fundamental systemic place in the movement⁴¹ and irrevocably guarantees the possibility of coordination between discipleship and Jesus' kin.

It has often been stated that Jesus' last words mean that the mother is included in the scheme of discipleship.⁴² In reality, one could also argue the reverse, i.e. that discipleship is remodeled on the basis of kinship criteria and logic. Given the paucity of the documentation, it seems impossible to prove this interpretation definitively. Very likely, an interpretation which leaves the discipleship model prevailing at the price of the kinship one, and *vice versa*, is substantially extraneous to John's vision, which probably tends to integrate reciprocally kinship and discipleship inside Jesus' movement.⁴³

To better understand John's view, we should consider the fact that Jesus need not have entrusted his mother to the beloved disciple. She could have remained with the group of women, or else alone, or been entrusted to Jesus' brothers.⁴⁴ John finds a less obvious or conventional way of relating kinship and discipleship. He introduces into discipleship the model of the mother-son link, but in isolation of the overall kinship system. John separates the mother-son bond from the usual kinship rules, thereby inevitably favoring the predominance of discipleship. The mother-son relationship is modified or reformulated by the dominant discipleship structure. This can be proven by examining the alternative case. Had the mother been entrusted to the brothers, she would have been eventually reabsorbed into the structure of the kinship authority, and the brothers would have acquired too great an influence on Jesus' movement.

In brief, to be in possession of the mother of Jesus alters the balance of power within the movement. That proves that discipleship does not eliminate the kinship function, but requires it to be coordinated with the discipleship system.

40 Receiving a new son is not the reward of a voluntary separation, as in Mark 10:29–30 (against Bauckham 1990, 52–53).

41 The son/mother scheme aims at the establishment of *relations* and not *identities*. Already at Cana, the mother-son relation having been transformed by submission to the logic of discipleship, Jesus had accepted its survival in the movement. Thus, the relation of Jesus' mother to the beloved disciple proves to be in continuity with her relation to her son before the cross.

42 Against R.E. Brown, 1978, 213: John is not dependent on Mark 3:31–53. Mary does not become a disciple, but assumes a mother-relation to the beloved disciple.

43 19:25–27 does not overturn kinship categories from the social family to the divine one (against Seim 1987, 63, 65).

44 The brothers' disbelief does not play a role here (against Seim 1987, 65).

6 Modifications of Kinship Logic and Discipleship Targets

We have attempted to cast light on how, in John's imagination, the relations generated within a kinship group—or, on the textual level, illustrated by kinship concepts—acquire important meaning in Jesus' movement. We have underlined, from the start, that Jesus' movement was an independent formation, not bound or limited by the kinship sphere. The first disciples were not Jesus' relatives, and among the Twelve it is not certain that there was any of Jesus' kin. The movement developed, however, in an environment in which kinship was a primary social matrix. From the very beginning, the movement had to take into account that its social context was marked by kinship logic and precepts.

In John, kinship undergoes some modifications whenever it comes into contact with the movement, whose central nucleus is based on disciples. Within the Jesus group a number of kinship links look imperfect or defective. a) The kinship system is not a rigid, unique instrument for the attribution of roles and functions. John's Jesus, his mother and brothers interact with each other dialectically, between acceptance and rejection. Their roles are mediated by something that lies outside the kinship system and comes from the movement. b) A second visible alteration within the kinship system is connected to the absence of Jesus' and disciples' fathers. This anomaly introduces elements of flexibility and indefiniteness into the roles. The disappearance of extended lineages, agnates, and women's male relatives, modifies contexts and roles. Male functions are taken on, in substitutive or reductive ways, by women.

Significantly, there are also influences on discipleship by kinship, because the Jesus group strongly needs to root itself in family solidity. In this connection: a) kinship offers an unquestionable social support to Jesus and his disciples, as shown by the mediating function of the mother at Cana and by the advising function of the brothers in occasion of the feast of Sukkot (7:3–4); b) kinship helps to consolidate the group of disciples around Jesus, as the family bonds at the wedding demonstrates; c) after Jesus' death, kinship seems to hold an integrative and leading role in the post-Jesus movement, as in the case of the relationship between the unnamed disciple and the mother.

In conclusion, John's social imagination attributes a positive function to kinship within Jesus' group. This represents a transformation and a discontinuity in relation to the dialectic between kinship and the interstitial Jesus movement that characterizes the historical Jesus. Such an evolution could reflect a socio-religious scenario similar to that in which James assumed a leading function in the group of Jesus' followers in Jerusalem after Jesus' death.

PART 2

Religious Practice as Continuity with Jesus



The Practice of the Heavenly Journey: The Case of Paul

1 How to Analyze a Practice¹

First, we must begin with ethnography. There is no anthropological analysis or interpretation without a previous ethnographical survey. Ethnography is the first necessary step for an approach to cultural environments and for the construction of an anthropological interpretation. It is the essential element of anthropological “disciplinary self-definition” as maintained by C. Clifford (1997, 53).

In a classical and general sense, ethnography is the result of personal research performed through extended periods of direct contact with a concrete case. It has the function of bringing to light the fundamental features of a person or a group, their practices and worldviews. It practically encompasses the act of observing, cataloging, delineating and representing specific historical and cultural phenomena. However, the ethnographical phase of research does not have only a descriptive and holistic function. The anthropologist is required to gain awareness of the disformity and distance of the subjects s/he intends to study and of the inescapable involvement between the anthropologist’s subjectivity and the subjectivity of his/her interlocutors (Clifford 1988).

To say that in the initial inductive phase, the researcher employs mental models and classificatory concepts is a truism. Ethnography needs to question the conceptual apparatus through which the researcher approaches his/her object of investigation. During the ethnographical phase begins the endless dialectic that leads to the creation of interpretive patterns, which are constantly evaluated and re-considered on the basis of the ethnographical results. As C. Ginzburg wrote: “in any scholarly situation a discussion on method has some value only when it is an *a posteriori* reflection on concrete research, not

¹ In this chapter, we publish a revision of our studies dedicated to the heavenly journey in Paul, presented on different occasions (École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris 2008; University of Rome “La Sapienza” 2009; Universitas Gregoriana, Rome 2009; Context Group Conference in Tützing 2009); Destro – Pesce 2009a; 2010b; 2011c; 2015. We would like to thank Emanuela Prinziavalli, Shaye Cohen, Antonio Pitta, Nicole Belayche, Jean-Daniel Dubois, Costantinos Macris for observations on a first draft of this chapter.

when it shows up (by far the most frequent case) as a series of *a priori* prescriptions” (Ginzburg 2012, 215).

In our anthropological research on the early texts written by Jesus’ followers, ordinary fieldwork is substituted by a ‘textwork’, i.e. an analysis of written materials and archeological evidence. We do not propose an *a priori* discourse on standardized methods and models. The initial phase of our “fieldwork” on texts does not consist of a deductive application of models elaborated by anthropologists on the basis of field research on other topics.

1.1 *Practical Knowledge*

Anyone who reads a text, or observes a fact, is external (in terms of time and space) to the social activities that s/he wants to find out. In the words of P. Bourdieu, this fact

inclines him (or her) to a hermeneutic representation of practices, leading him (or her) to reduce all social relations to communicative relations and more precisely, to decoding operations (Bourdieu 1989, 1).

We want to avoid a hermeneutical reflection or a decoding operation on the practice. Our attempt is directed toward understanding the practice without reducing it to a theoretical meaning, which would be external to the practice itself. We try to avoid the reduction of a social practice to a mental interpretation or to a narrative of a communicative act. The practice, in its nature, is essentially different from its conceptual representation. Playing or listening to music is an experience radically different from speaking of music or thinking about it. Painting and looking at a picture are phenomena which cannot be reduced to a conceptual interpretation of them. In the same way, any practice (walking, working, performing a ritual action, etc.) is an experience irreducible to its conceptual understanding. The focus of our investigation is, therefore, concentrated on what we can define as “practical knowledge”, a primary and unavoidable form of understanding (Bourdieu 1989; C. Bell 1992).

At the center of Bourdieu’s work is a logic of actions and gestures that emphasizes the importance of the body and bodily habits within everyday social relations. It is widely known that, according to him, the practice is the result of a *habitus*, of the incorporation of regularities and immanent tendencies of the social world. Bourdieu’s sociology can be considered as an investigation of the so-called pre-reflexive conditions that generate certain beliefs and practices. Bourdieu sees the *habitus* as the key of any kind of social reproduction, because it is central to generating and regulating the acts and behaviors that make up social life.

Individuals learn what is 'possible' and can be ordinarily desired. They rarely aspire to what is absolutely inaccessible to them. The conditions in which the individuals live are those that generate dispositions compatible with such achievable aspirations (including preferences in lifestyles, food, body care, literature, art, etc.). In a certain sense, these compatible dispositions are pre-adapted to the individual's demands. The most improbable practices are therefore excluded as unthinkable, due to a kind of submission to an order that compels agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is categorically denied and to adhere to what is inevitable (Bourdieu 1990, 54).

This means that we have to look primarily at the actual actions and gestures, at the incorporations of cultural habits in precise bodily forms or behaviors. It is an approach that is important not only to our contemporary notion of a practice, but also to the ancient representations and definitions of it.

1.2 *The Heavenly Journey as a Religious Practice*

We seek to demonstrate that in ancient cultures the heavenly journey was a widespread practice because, following Bourdieu's terms, everyone who practiced it was prompted to such experience by a cultural *habitus*. A certain number of pre-reflexive behaviors incorporated in the bodily experiences of many women and men induced in them a perception of normal life as if it were constantly open to the influence of the supernatural world and divine powers. Men and women of the ancient world seem to be inclined to place themselves in a specific disposition, a kind of bodily-psychic dissociation, which could produce the heavenly journey. The heavenly journey was a cultural procedure approved and shared by many people, a normal practice rooted in different religious environments.

Within this general background, we focus on the heavenly journey of Paul² as a phenomenon present in diverse ancient cultures. In the Second letter to the Corinthians Paul speaks of his journey to the third heaven, or Paradise:

I will go on to visions (*optasiai*) and revelations (*apokalypseis*) of the Lord.³ I know (*oida*) a man in Christ who fourteen years⁴ ago—whether in (*en*) the body or out of (*ektos*) the body I do not know; God knows—

2 On Paul's heavenly journey, see: Goulder 2003; Menoud 1953; Morray-Jones 1993; Heininger 1996, 2004; Jegher-Bucher 1996; Porter – Olbricht 1993; Quispel 2006; Robbins 2003; Ruiz 1994; Scott 1996; Segal 1996; M. Smith 1996a, 1996b; Tabor 1986; Wischmeyer 2004; Tubiana 2012.

3 On the relevance of revelations in Paul, see 1 Cor 1:7; 14:6–26; 2 Cor 12:1–7; Gal 1:12–16; 2:2; Phil 3:15 and also Eph 1:17.

4 The motif of fourteen years in relation to a revelation is also present in Gal 2:1–2.

was caught (*arpagenta*) up to the third heaven. And I know that such a man—whether in (*en*) the body or without (*chôris*) the body I do not know; God knows—was caught (*êrpagê*) up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words⁵ (*arrêta rêmata*), that no man is permitted to pronounce (12:1–4).

Here, Paul describes an interior experience in concrete terms, making use of his cultural devises (cosmology, Jewish visions of the heavens, conceptions about supernatural experiences, notions about the body, etc.)

2 **The Heavenly Journey in some Christian and Gnostic Texts: A Jewish “Tradition”?**

Can we consider the experiences described in the Second Letter to the Corinthians and in early Christian and Gnostic texts to be part of an intra-Jewish linear “tradition” of the religious practice or literary topos of the heavenly journey, as many specialists in Jewish and Christian literature maintain? Or, conversely, do we need to make recourse to a model of interpretation, different from that of diachronic “tradition”? Can Paul’s heavenly journey be understood within his Greco-Hellenistic, and Roman environment, of which Jewish groups (and texts) were also part?

“Tradition” is normally understood in terms of a regular and continuous diachronic transmission of concepts and practices to which a given group attributes authority. Through the idea of tradition, a group affirms its identity and supports its claim to be in legitimate continuity with a people or persons of the past. It presupposes that, in spite of modifications and variations, a given group maintains, through a repeated transmission, its basic characteristics. Loyalty to a long-lasting tradition therefore guarantees the maintenance of identity. However, the concept of tradition generally implies something more (Destro – Pesce 2014b, 71–76). It means exclusivity: conceptions and practices of a group are supposed to be different from those of other groups, equally characterized by their distinctive traditions (see Hobsbawm 1983; Sachot 1999). This assumption has a number of important implications and repercussions. Scholars who uphold the validity of the concept of tradition maintain, for example, that a text belongs to a group when an element (supposed to belong to its particular tradition) is present in it.

In the case of the heavenly journey our aim is to challenge the concept of linear diachronic tradition within the same group. In a context of religious

5 See Papyri Graecae Magicae XIII, 763 (Preisendanz 1973, 122; Betz 2003).

and cultural plurality and interconnections, the groups communicate, and many conceptions and practices are mutually influenced. In many cases, the effects resulting from contact with contemporary groups are equally or even more important than traditions inherited from previous generations of the same group.

Already in 1979 J.J. Collins had the merit of showing how the genre of apocalyptic revelation was widespread in disparate areas of the Ancient Greek, Middle-Eastern, Hellenistic and Roman cultures (Collins 1979). He also made a distinction between revelations with or without a heavenly journey. In particular, a major result of his research was that the heavenly journey couldn't be considered as an exclusively Jewish phenomenon. Moreover, A.F. Segal could affirm that "it is possible to see the heavenly journey of the soul, its consequent promise of immortality and the corollary necessity of periodic ecstatic journeys to heaven as the dominant mythical constellation of late antiquity" (Segal 1980, 1388). This fact was already recognized by M. Smith according to which this type of experience had been widely "popularized", "and is found everywhere in the literature of the late republic and early empire" (Smith 1996, 51; See also Smith 1963; 1971).

In his system of classification J.J. Collins tended to identify the revelation obtained through a heavenly journey as a literary genre. We will instead examine the heavenly journey (a) in terms of a practice in its experiential and social aspects, and (b) as an experience that is distinct in relation to revelation. The ethnographical basis of our research (Destro – Pesce 2009, 2010a, 2010b) is constituted by a large number of descriptions of the heavenly journey in Babylonian,⁶ Greek, Roman, Jewish, early Christian, Gnostic, Mithraic, mysteric, and magical texts from the third millennium before CE to the fifth century CE: the heavenly journey of King Etana (Babylonia: third millennium before CE) attested in many texts and glyptic representations; the Poem of Parmenides (sixth century before CE); Plato, Republic 614b-621d; Cicero, *Somnium Scipionis*; Seneca, *Consolatio ad Marciam* 25,1–2; Plutarch's The Demon of Socrates [*De Genio Socratis*] (around 90 CE);⁷ Philo, *De opificio mundi* 69–71; *Specialibus Legibus* III,1–2; the so called Liturgy of Mithra.

The issue of the heavenly journey present in Paul obviously cannot be isolated from its widespread presence in early Christian and Gnostic texts. We

6 The heavenly journey to the third heaven in order to receive supernatural revelations and gifts is already present in the Babylonian epos of king Etana (Langdon 1932; Haul 2000; Hrouda 1996).

7 Plutarch reports another description of a heavenly journey in *The Delays in Divine Vengeance* 22–33. See also, Segal 1980, 1346.

find it, for example, in Revelation (4:1),⁸ the Ascension of Isaiah (6–11),⁹ the Gospel of Thomas,¹⁰ the Gospel of the Savior, and in Gnostic texts, like The Paraphrase of Sem (NHC VII,1); the “Zostrian” Tractate (NHC VIII,1); the Coptic Apocalypse of Paul (NHC V,2). Where and how does this early Christian and Gnostic evidence stand in relation to the Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman texts dealing with the heavenly journey, on the one hand, and with antecedent, contemporary, and later Jewish texts, on the other?¹¹

In the Jewish literature of Antiquity several texts speaking of the heavenly journey are antecedent to Second Corinthians, for example: 1 Enoch 1–36; 40:52–54; 60–61 (Book of Parables); 72–82 (Book of Luminaries); Testament of Levi 2–5 (this latter being difficult to date, given the possibility of “Christian” insertions); the Exagoge of Ezechiel 68–89.¹² On the heavenly journey in Qumran, we must look at 1QApGen 11:23; 4Q534; 4Q529; and also 4Q491 fr. 11; 1Q16:4–26; 4Q286; 4Q405. Some are more or less coeval, such as the texts of Philo. Others come immediately after Paul, and are more or less contemporary to the Ascension of Isaiah, such as, the Apocalypse of Abraham 15–32; 2 Baruch; 2 Enoch 8:1; Testament of Abraham 10–15 (8–12 in version B); Apocalypse of Zephaniah. Others, again, are clearly of later date: such as 3 Enoch, the hekhalotic texts, and Rabbinic passages recounting the journey to *pardes* (tHag 2:2–5; yHag 77b; bHag. 14b-15b; Cant. R. 1:28).

The questions we pose are the following: in what way did interrelating religious groups borrow religious forms, practices and elements from each other? To what extent was Paul’s knowledge and practice of the celestial journey drawn from a Greco-Roman environment or, on the contrary, from a Jewish context? Did he draw upon one religious environment alone or upon many interconnected environments?

It seems clear that the conception of the heavenly journey in Greco-Roman texts belongs to an experience that is independent of Jewish influences. However, the same cannot be said of the Jewish and Gnostic texts. They could depend on the Greco-Roman cultural transmission as well as on shared

8 Lupieri 1999, 137–138; Arcari 2012, 166–167.

9 Bettio, Kossova, Leonardi, Norelli, Perrone, 1995.

10 According to DeConick 1996, in the Gospel of Thomas the heavenly journey is presupposed in vv. 50, 15, 83, 59, 27, 37, 84.

11 On the heavenly journey in ancient Jewish literature, see Arcari, 2004, 64–84; Evans – Flint, eds. 1997; Gruenwald, 1980. 1988; Halperin, 1980; Himmelfarb, 1988, 1993, 1996; Knohl, 2008, 147–158; Janowitz 1989; Lanfranchi, 2003; Lesses, 1998; Nickelsburg, 1981, 2006; Saldarini, 1979; Scholem, 1965; Tabor, 1989; Wright, 2000.2001.2004. Savran 2005, 230–244.

12 Lanfranchi 2003.

sources. It seems rather difficult to admit the existence of a Jewish or even a Jewish apocalyptic “tradition” from the Book of Kings to the Book of Enoch, to Philo and then to Paul, to the Ascension of Isaiah, the Gospel of the Savior, down to the Christian gnostic texts and to Hekhalotic literature, within which the transmission of the conception, practice or literary model of the heavenly journey takes place, independently of contacts with ancient Middle-Eastern, Greek and Hellenistic cultures.

The examples that we have studied seem to refer to a kind of practice of contact with the supernatural that was present in various ancient cultures with distinctive characteristics. This fact leads us away from the scheme of independent transmissions diachronically perpetuating themselves within its own culture. The explanatory approach should no longer be only that of a linear tradition or literary relation, but that of manifold contacts and cohabitations of people, which we might call “cultural traffic”. It occurred over an extended period of time and involved very different areas (Rome, Greece, Asia Minor, Syria, Ancient Middle East). Cities are the most propitious places in which groups can really interact, reinterpreting models and shared behavioral practices according to their own sensibilities and needs. The religious coexistence of a plurality of groups within the same city (with all the inevitable issues of identity changes, transformations and conflicts) constitutes the context that justifies the use of common cultural schemes.

Our hypothesis is that the heavenly journey is a religious practice that was consistently followed throughout wide areas. Many different groups used this cultural device in their own way, while nevertheless preserving some of its characteristics and recognizable traits. This might have been possible despite the changes brought by different situations and times. As A.F. Segal affirmed, “a mythical structure of *katabasis* and *anabasis* [...] was shared by most cultures [...]. However, the mythical structure was developed in specific ways according to individual cultural traditions” (Segal 1980, 1387).

3 An Ethnography of the Heavenly Journey

3.1 *The Journey of Menippus (Lucian of Samosata)*

The fact that the heavenly journey was a universally recognized pattern in the early centuries of the Common Era is confirmed by the dialogue *Icarus-Menippus* or *Above the Clouds*,¹³ written around 160–165 CE by Lucian of

13 “Icaromenippo o l'uomo sopra le nubi,” in Longo 1986, 847–885. See also Talbot 1912 *ad locum*.

Samosata.¹⁴ In this work, Lucian speaks of the journey as a recognized conception, so much so that he adopts it to channel his criticisms of the philosophy of the time. His irony focuses, first of all, on the impossibility of a man to ascend to the home of Zeus (above all heavenly bodies). The hypothetical distances between earth, moon, sun and the heaven of Zeus are a subject of derision:

First stage, Earth to Moon three thousand stades [560 kilometers]; second stage, up to the Sun five hundred parasangs circa [2775 kilometers].¹⁵ Then the third, to the actual Heaven and Zeus's citadel, might be put at a day's journey for an eagle in light marching order (*Icarus-Menippus* 1).

Lucian deals with a whole series of themes commonly encountered in religious texts dealing with the heavenly journey. How can the earth and life thereon be seen from on high? How is it possible to know from on high what happens below? How can the Gods hear the prayers of men? What is man's ultimate destiny and what is the structure of the universe? He seems to know details typical of ascension texts, such as the idea that access to the upper heavens is overseen by guardians, and that there is a door at the entrance:

Three days' flight through the stars, with the Sun on my right hand, brought me close to Heaven; and my first idea was to go straight in as I was; I should easily pass unobserved in virtue of my half-eagleship; for of course the eagle was Zeus's familiar; on second thoughts, though, my vulture wing would very soon betray me. So, thinking it better not to run any risks, I went up to the door and knocked. Hermes opened, took my name, and hurried off to inform Zeus. After a brief wait I was asked to step in; I was now trembling with apprehension, and I found that the Gods, who were all seated together, were not quite easy themselves. The unexpected nature of the visit was slightly disturbing to them, and they had visions of all mankind arriving at my heels by the same conveyance (*Icarus-Menippus* 20).

Furthermore, he refers to a typical experience described in these texts: the fact that the visionary is suddenly surrounded by a great light.

¹⁴ B. Schwartz 1965.

¹⁵ On the treatise of Aristarchus of Samos (310–230 BCE), *On the Sizes and Distances of the Sun and Moon*, see: Heath 1913.

I had no sooner flapped the wing than a flood of light enveloped me, and things that before I had not even been aware of became perfectly clear (*Icarus-Menippus*, 15).

Lucian refers only to three heavens (the moon, the sun and the higher heavens), and not to the nine heavens of Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* (the seven planets, the earth, and the heaven where the deity resides). Neither is he dealing with the astronomical vision of Ptolemy, who was also writing around that time,¹⁶ who in *Almagest* and *Hypotheses* placed Mercury and Venus between the Moon and the Sun. The dialogue of Lucian shows, at any rate, that the motif of the three heavens could be associated with the heavenly journey in a Greek context, exactly as it was in a Jewish context, as we shall see below.

Instead of constituting a founding and legitimizing element of philosophical and religious truth, in Lucian, the heavenly journey becomes a demonstration of a supposed crisis of philosophy and religion.

3.2 *The Poem of Parmenides*¹⁷

Within Greco-Roman culture the heavenly journey is attested in numerous texts.¹⁸ One of them is the poem that narrates a journey undertaken by Parmenides on a horse-drawn chariot, guided by young women. The chariot leaves the regions of the night and proceeds towards that of light. A bolted door is opened and Parmenides is received by a Goddess, who makes a fundamental philosophical revelation:

you must be instructed on everything: on the heart without variation of the persuasive truth and on the opinions of the mortal men in which there is no true certitude (vv. 28–30).¹⁹

16 Lerner 2008, 70: "Abordant [...] le problème de la position de Mercure et de Vénus dans la série des planètes, Ptolémée avait estimé plus probable l'opinion des astronomes anciens qui les plaçaient entre la lune et le soleil." On ancient astronomy, see A. Jeremias 1905; Luck 1985; Neugebauer 1985, 386–415; Verdet 1998.

17 Conche 2004, 41–64; See also Diels and Kranz 2004, 268–271; Gemelli Marciano (2010) sees in the journey of Parmenides, a *katabasis* and not an heavenly journey.

18 See Attridge 1979. On the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Nock and Festugière 1945–1954; M. Smith 1966a; Colpe 1967a. 1967b; Culianu 1986.

19 See the translation of Couloubaritis 2008, 540: "tu dois t'enquérir de toutes choses, d'une part, du coeur inflexible d'Alètheia bien-arrondie, d'autre part, des considerations des mortels, en lesquelles il n'y a pas de créance vraie."

It does not describe a crossing of the heavens, but rather an ascension and a passage from night to day, a transition from dark to glory.²⁰ The text contains descriptions of the bolted door and of the heaven seat of the deity and place of revelation. Extraordinarily revealing in terms of relationships among different cultures is the image of the wheels of fire of Parmenides' chariot. It will not escape that also the chariot on which Elijah travels to heaven has wheels of fire (2 Kgs 2:11), and that the four wheels of the cherubim in Ezekiel (10:1–18) are also of fire. It cannot be a coincidence that the heavenly journey in these cases is undertaken with similar instruments. A contact or an indirect relation must be hypothesized.

3.3 *Plato, Republic 614b–621d*²¹

This is a fundamental text on which, however, we cannot dwell at length. The heavenly journey of Er, son of Armenius, is undertaken in the ten days between his death in battle and his coming back to life. The fact seems to suggest that only a dead person can make such a journey or that only certain physical conditions can permit it. It is the *psychê* of Er that makes the journey after its detachment from his body (614b). The heavens are described. Mention is made of the harmonious music they emit (617b). The revelation concerns the destiny of human beings: the punishments and rewards awaiting them, and the reincarnation undergone by souls.

3.4 *Cicero, Somnium Scipionis*²²

The *Somnium Scipionis*, contained in Cicero's *De Republica*, and written almost a century before Paul's Second Corinthians, gives evidence of the presence of the heavenly journey motif in a Roman context. In the sky, Scipio contemplates the heavens, listens to the music of the heavenly spheres and sees his ancestor and his father. It is interesting that Macrobius, who transmits Cicero's *De Republica* text, sets the *Somnium Scipionis* in relation to Plato's story of Er (Cicero, *De Republica* VI, 8). It is hardly by chance that both journeys are situated at the end of two works that deal with political life (Plato's, with the story of Er, and Cicero's, with Scipio's dream).

The description of the beginning of the journey bears witness to Cicero's interest in the physical conditions that can induce a revelatory dream.²³ In his journey Scipio essentially obtains the revelation of the meaning of life: the

²⁰ Tarán 1965.

²¹ See Lozza 1990, 822–845.

²² See Bréguet 2002, 103–118.

²³ On the dream as a means of revelation, see *De Divinatione*, xx, 39 ff.

body is a prison from which man must be freed, after death, in order to return to the place where souls originate, the highest heaven. It is therefore necessary to know “the way that leads to heaven.” The way consists of the exercise of justice and piety, especially towards the fatherland (*patria*):

But, Scipio, like this your grandfather, like me, your father, cherish justice and that sacred observance of duty to your kind, which, while of great worth toward parents and family, is of supreme value toward your fatherland (*patria*). Such a life is the way to heaven (*ea vita via est in caelum*), and to this assembly of those who have already lived, and, released from the body, inhabit the place which you now see,—it was that circle that shines forth among the stars in the most dazzling white,—which you have learned from the Greeks to call the Milky Way (*Somnium Scipionis*, 16).

There is no description of Scipio's journey through the heavens. In his dream he finds himself already in the celestial region. The heavens are said to be formed of nine circles, above which is the highest heaven—the Milky Way (*Somnium Scipionis* 17–19). Below there are seven spheres that “have a retrograde movement, opposite to that of the heavens” (*Somnium Scipionis*, 17). As they move, they emit a cosmic music (as narrated in many texts, from Plato to the hermetic writings):

tantus est totius mundi incitatissima conversione sonitus, ut eum aures hominum capere non possint (*Somnium Scipionis*, 19).

It is worth noting the similarity between the sentence “ut eum aures hominum capere non possint” and Paul's words in 2 Cor 12:4: “(he) heard inexpressible words, that no man is permitted to pronounce.” In these chapters of the *Somnium* we encounter also the description of a range of psychosomatic experiences undergone by Scipio in the heavens.²⁴

24 On the ascent of the soul of the righteous man to the heaven where the righteous men of the past live, see also Seneca, *Consolatio ad Marciam* 25.1–2 (Viansino 1993, 89); see also Waltz 2003, 50–51.

3.5 *Plutarch, The Demon of Socrates*²⁵

Written around 90 CE, this work is roughly coeval with the Gospel of Luke, and the *Vision of Isaiah* (contained in chapters 6–11 of the *Ascension of Isaiah*, that we will discuss below), and probably a little before the Gospel of John. It tells of Timarchus descending into the crypt of Trophonius.²⁶

Timarchus [...] in his desire to learn the nature of Socrates' demon, [...] descended into the crypt of Trophonius, first performing the rites that are customary at the oracle. He remained underground two nights and a day [...] He said that on descending into the oracular crypt his first experience was a profound darkness; next, after a prayer, he lay a long time not clearly aware whether he was awake or dreaming. It did seem to him, however, that at the same moment he heard a crash and was struck on the head, and that the sutures parted and released his soul (*psychê*). As it withdrew and mingled joyfully with air that was translucent and pure, it felt in the first place that now, after long being cramped, it had again found relief, and was growing larger than before, spreading out like a sail (*The Demon of Socrates*, 590B).

He then lies down and, half-awake, for two nights and a day, experiences a journey through the heavens. During the journey, he acquires knowledge of the structure of the cosmos (Hades, Earth, and heavens above), how the celestial bodies were generated, and the identities of their guardians and protectors. Above all, he learns of the nature of man (soul, intellect, and the demon), the destinies of souls (and how they are united with and freed from the body) and the cognitive capacities of man.

At the end of the journey, Plutarch once again describes Timarchus' psychosomatic experience:

When the voice ceased Timarchus desired to turn (he said) and see who the speaker was. But once more he felt a sharp pain in his head, as though it had been violently compressed, and he lost all recognition and awareness of what was going on about him; but he presently recovered and saw

25 Plutarch, *On the Sign of Socrates* (*De genio Socratis*), in *Moralia* (De Lacy – Einarson 1968, 361–598; See also Hani 2003); *Del Corno* 2005.

26 See *Del Corno* 2005, 102; Hani 2003, 108. Plutarch reports another description of a heavenly journey in *The Delays in Divine Vengeance* 22–33; (*Del Corno* 2005, 164–175). See also Segal 1980, 1346.

that he was lying in the crypt of Trophonius near the entrance, at the very spot where he had first laid himself down (*The Demon of Socrates*, 592 E).

Throughout this array of texts, there are important references to the actual psychosomatic experience that takes place during the initial preparation, the journey itself, and the final time of reawakening. Not surprisingly, the journey always leads to the knowledge of an esoteric doctrine concerning the cosmic structure, the human nature and its ultimate destiny. We shall return to this and see that the doctrine may end up counterbalancing popular representations or standard visions of the world, conferring authority on specific persons (who become specialists) and legitimizing their doctrine and functions.

3.6 *Philo of Alexandria*

Descriptions of the experience of the heavenly journey are also present in the writings of Philo of Alexandria. He was perhaps a generation older than Paul.²⁷ In *De opificio mundi*, commenting the passage in Genesis where God makes Man in his own “image and likeness,” Philo states that the intellect (*nous*) of man

is invisible (*aoratos*), though it sees everything itself; and it has an essence which is indiscernible (*adêlon*), though it can discern the essences of all other things, and making for itself by art (*technais*) and science (*epistêmais*) all sorts of roads leading in diverse directions, and all plain; it traverses land and sea, investigating everything which is contained in either element (*Opif.* 69).

In fact,

being raised up on wings, and so surveying and contemplating the air, and all the commotions to which it is subject, it is borne upwards to the higher firmament, and to the revolutions of the heavenly bodies. And also being itself involved in the revolutions of the planets and fixed stars according to the perfect laws of music, and being led on by love, which is the guide of wisdom, it proceeds onwards till, having surmounted all essence intelligible by the external senses, it comes to aspire to such as is perceptible only by the intellect (*Opif.* 70).

27 Cf. Borgen, 1993, 246–268; Dean-Otting 1984.

On contemplating tangible things in all their reality and beauty, the soul, Philo says, is invaded by a state of enthusiasm:

it becomes seized with a sort of sober intoxication like the zealots engaged in the Corybantian festivals, and yields to enthusiasm, becoming filled with another desire, and a more excellent longing, by which it is conducted onwards to the very summit of such things as are perceptible only to the intellect, till it appears to be reaching the great King himself (*Opif.* 71).

Finally, the intellect is filled with divine splendor:

And while it is eagerly longing to behold him pure and unmingled, rays of divine light are poured forth upon it like a torrent, so as to bewilder the eyes of its intelligence by their splendor (*Opif.* 71).

The verbs in the passive—uplifted, carried, grasped, filled, driven (*artheis*, *pheretai*, *kataschetheis*, *gemistheis*, *parapemphtheis*)—denote the actions through which the intellect is forced upwards, even if what moves it is its own internal divine desire. The ascent is not only produced by the intellect, but also by the divine power that resides within it. This divine force of the intellect is set free by philosophical contemplation, which provokes the detachment of the intellect from the body and permits its ascent to the heavens, far from the earth.²⁸

It is also crucial to note that the description of the soul's psychosomatic state is understood in the light of the religious practice of corybants. It is this contemporary religious performance (and not only middle-Platonic philosophy) that allows the interpretation of the intellect's experience. It is a fact, which proves that Philo moved outside of any presumed Jewish "tradition" of the heavenly journey.

Philo also speaks of the heavenly journey in *De Specialibus Legibus* 3.1–2, where he reports a personal experience. During his journey, his soul is carried to "the sun, the moon, and to the whole heaven, and the whole world":

I appeared to be raised on high and borne aloft by a certain inspiration (*epitheiasmos*) of the soul (*psychê*), and to dwell in the regions of the sun and moon, and to associate with the whole heaven, and the whole universal world (*Spec. Leg.* 3.1).

28 See also, *Det.* 89 and Dean-Otting 1984, 32–33.

From above, Philo looks down upon earthly things:

looking down from above, from the air, and straining the eye of my mind as from a watchtower, I surveyed the unspeakable contemplations (*tas amythêτους theôrias*) of all the things on the earth, and looked upon myself as happy as having forcibly escaped from all the evil fates (*Spec. Leg. 3.2*).

Certainly, the “unspeakable” contemplations and what “cannot be told in a story” show a similarity with the “unutterable words” of Paul. However, we must guard against ingenuous direct comparisons between the two texts.

Philo’s heavenly journey is prepared for and induced by a philosophical meditation focusing only on divine objects (*theiois logois kai dogmasin*). It is an experience that arises at a certain point within his intellectual quest and is produced by the soul’s urge toward the divine:

I appeared to be raised on high and borne aloft by a certain inspiration (*epitheiasmos*) of the soul (*psychê*) (*Spec. 3.1*).

The journey permits a vision of all the world’s affairs from above. The soul perceives itself to participate in heaven’s nature, and to escape from the mortal dimension of the world. We are not far from the spiritual and religious atmosphere of Cicero’s *Somnium Scipionis*. The celestial journey is not an eccentric or marginal practice. It appears to be profoundly rooted in a widely diffused religious atmosphere. As mentioned previously, the places of this common religious atmosphere were above all cities or large settlements. In the cultural traffic of the cities, different individuals and groups cohabited and interacted, reinterpreting in their own way common behavioral models and concrete religious practices.

In our argumentation, the case of Philo has the function of demonstrating that a first-century Jew could speak of the heavenly journey as the center of his religious experience, without referring to the apocalyptic tradition, because he was living in deep symbiosis with Hellenistic religious practices and philosophy.

3.7 *The “Liturgy of Mithra”*

The text of the so-called “Liturgy of Mithra”²⁹ explains how the journey unfolds to the initiates who are to ascend to the heavens. It has often been disputed

29 Preisdanz 1973, 88–101; Betz 2003; Dieterich 1923.

whether the text actually concerns a Mithraic ritual. In any case, it appears near to Mithraic rituals that envisage the soul's ascent to the heaven, as was also affirmed by Celsus and Porphyrius (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 6. 21–22;³⁰ Porphyrius, *De antro nympharum*, 5–6³¹). According to Celsus, in the initiation of Mithra

there is a symbolic representation of the two movements in the heavens that of the stars and that of the planets and also of the passage of the *psychê* through them. The figuration is that of a stairway with seven doors. Above them there is an eighth door (*Contra Celsum* 6, 22).³²

The Mithraic theory of the initiate's ascension through the seven heavens³³ had certainly been well known from the first century before the CE, as is attested by the mosaic of the Mithreus at Ostia Antica.³⁴ What is important is that, according to many studies,³⁵ the heavenly journey in Mithraic religiosity seems to have influenced the Judaism of hekhalotic texts. This fact offers further evidence of the importance of contacts and cultural traffic among different groups.

3.8 *The Ascension of Isaiah*

After Paul, in the texts of the Jesus' followers, the practice of the heavenly journey appears in a context of profound interrelation among different cultural environments.

In this regard, the *Ascension of Isaiah* is of extreme relevance. The text is datable between the end of the first century and the beginning of the second. Perhaps it originates in Antioch in Syria.³⁶ Its historical importance lies in its detailed description of the way in which Isaiah is supposed to have experienced the celestial journey. The phenomenon, represented as an ecstatic experience, takes place during a collective prophetic liturgy in which a prophet (Isaiah) is prophesying. He suddenly ceases to speak, his eyes open, and his breath is suspended. The body remains on earth while the spirit is carried to the heavens. The description of these ecstatic elements suggests that the text may be the

30 See Ressa 2000, 446–449; see also Gallagher 1982.

31 See Simonini 1986.

32 Cf. Ressa 2000, 447 note 125.

33 Cf. Sfameni Gasparro 2005, 99–101. See also Ulansey 1984. 2005.

34 See *Papyri Graecae Magicae* in Preisendanz 1973, 88–101; Betz 2003; Dieterich 1923.

35 See e.g. Lesses 1998, 336–344.

36 P. Bettolo, A. Kossova, C. Leonardi, E. Norelli, L. Perrone (eds.), 1995.

product of prophetic groups that are referring to their own performances, and not to literary models or abstract doctrinal conceptions. The fact that in the Ascension of Isaiah the heavenly journey does not take place within the body allows a better understanding of Paul's assertion "whether in the body or out of the body I do not know" (2 Cor 12:2–3).

It is true that the description of Isaiah's ascent through the heavens contains mythological features (the guardians and the doors of each heaven, the angels living there, and so on) that also appear in Jewish and Roman-Hellenistic texts. The literary nexus with Jewish ascension texts is undeniable, but we may recognize also a close relation with the Roman-Hellenistic literature.

The Ascension of Isaiah has a cosmology of seven heavens, which become nine if we include the air and the heaven where God lives, as in Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*. However, the seven heavens are not conceived of as divinities: in each of them reside different angels, situated to the right and left of an angelic throne presiding over each heaven. The existence of a difference in relation to the cosmology of Paul demonstrates that we cannot speak of a unitary early Christian "tradition" of the heavenly journey. Each text reacts distinctively to the influence of the cultural and historical context of its time.

Recourse to the motif of the celestial journey seems to arise, in the Ascension of Isaiah, in connection with a localized debate between early Christian groups and their Jewish milieu, or even among the different strands of early Christianity. Such debates were perhaps characteristic of some prophetic environments of Antioch in Syria.³⁷ One reason why recourse to the heavenly journey becomes opportune is the need to show that the highest heaven is not only the abode of God and the Holy Spirit, but also of the Beloved. From there he will descend to earth, transforming himself into various angelic figures, until eventually assuming the human form of Jesus. The fact that the biblical prophet Isaiah at the end of his ascension finds in heaven the Beloved next to God, offers a demonstration of the pre-existence of Jesus. Consequently, the prophet's vision becomes an instrument for the legitimation of the faith in Jesus and for the christological interpretation of the biblical prophecy. However, Isaiah's encounter with the Beloved above the heavens, long before his descent, also serves to take a position in debates concerning the different options available for the definition of Jesus' identity (prophet, messiah, son of man, *logos*, pre-existing son).

The choice of the heavenly journey and prophetic ecstasy as legitimizing tools (Arcari 2012, 2014) shows how widely accepted this practice and this

37 The second part of the *Ascension* (chapters 6–11: the so-called *Vision*) was known to the Gospel of John 12:41; see Pesce 2003a; 2007.

cultural pattern were. It appears widespread among Jewish groups, among Jesus' followers, and even some Hellenistic circles, in Syria around the end of the first century. Actually, this dissemination shows the flexibility of such pattern and how it can assume different roles in different contexts.

3.9 *The Gospel of the Savior*

The title Gospel of the Savior has been attributed to a text published for the first time in 1999 by Ch.W. Hedrick and P.A. Mirecki.³⁸ The text is present in two manuscripts written in Sahidic Coptic: Berlin, Papyrussammlung, P. Berol. 22220 and Strasbourg, Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire, Copte 4–7. A third Sahidic Coptic manuscript (Aswan, Nubian Museum, Special Number 168, ff. 12v–17r.) contains a résumé of part of the work (Suciu 2013, 9–14). Some scholars are inclined to see these fragments as part of a lost gospel.

In the text, the heavenly journey plays a particular role: it is mentioned no less than three times (100. 33–35; 113.1–59; 122.61–64). The most important passage is the first: (following the translation and new numeration of S. Emmel):

26:28–36 28 [... 12± lines untranslatable ...] (B 100:ii) on the mountain. 29 We became as spiritual bodies. Our eyes opened wide in every direction. The whole place was revealed before us. 30 We [saw] the heavens, and they [opened] up one after another. 31 The guardians of the gates were alarmed. 32 The angels were afraid and [fled] this [way] and that, thinking [that] they would all be destroyed. 33 We saw our Savior having penetrated all the heavens, [his] feet [placed firmly on] the [mountain with us, his head penetrating the seventh] heaven. 34 [... 8 lines untranslatable ...] (B 101) [...] all the heavens. 35 Then before us, the apostles, this world became as darkness. 36 We became as [those] among the [immortal] aeons, with our [eyes penetrating all] the heavens, clothed with the [power of] our apostleship, and we saw our Savior when he had reached the [seventh] heaven.³⁹

This section of the text narrates an experience that passes through various phases: the apostles' transformation into spiritual bodies; a vision ("Our eyes opened wide in every direction. The whole place was revealed before us". "We [saw] the heavens, and they [opened] up one after another. The guardians of the gates were alarmed. The angels were afraid and [fled] this [way] and that,

38 See Hedrick and Mirecki 1999. See also Emmel 2000; 2002a; 2002b; 2003; 2005; J. Frey 2002; Hedrick 2003; Nagel 2003; Plisch 2002, 27–34; 2005; H.M. Schenke 1998.

39 Emmel 2000, 12.

thinking [that] they would all be destroyed", 40–48); the apostles see the Savior who has journeyed through the heavens (49–51).

The journey returns in 113,1–59 and also in 122,61–64. In the latter passage, it probably offers an explanation of its systemic function in the Gospel of the Savior. The journey undertaken by the *Soter* permits his apostles to obtain religious knowledge. We are probably dealing with a group that develops its religious conceptions not only through an inspired exegesis of the words of the Savior and the Jewish Scriptures, as in John,⁴⁰ but also through the quest for and experience of ecstasy.

The date of composition of the Gospel of Savior is today at the center of intense debate. The prevalent opinion now seems to exclude the second century. A. Suci, for example, suggested that "the true context in which the text must be inserted is the literature of the 5th-6th century post-Chalcedonian Coptic Egypt (Suci 2013, 35). If the text was produced in the second century CE, it can be taken as an element of the context to which the celestial journey of Paul also belongs. Otherwise it can be considered only as part of the history of the practice or literary pattern of heavenly journey in Late Antiquity.

3.10 *Elements of an Ethnography of the Heavenly Journey*

The reported cases, each one with its own distinctive and specific characteristics, seem to constitute single instances of a widespread phenomenon. This phenomenon can be explained as effect of a "cultural traffic" over an extended period of time, involving wide cultural areas. The existence of a wide interconnection of religious conceptions and practices has a consequence. It leads to refuse the scheme of a transmission of the practice, conception, or literary model of the heavenly journey (from 1 Kings and 1 Enoch to Paul) within one single Jewish "tradition".

Our approach stresses the primacy of the experience and of the ritual practice. In our perspective, the heavenly journey must be analyzed as a performance that takes place within a specific cultural environment, through predetermined corporal expressions. The following features are recurrent in the different performative forms of the heavenly journey.

a) The journey involves a detachment, a separation of a part of the person (spirit, intellect, or mind, for example) from the rest of the body. In *Somnium Scipionis*, the detachment is permitted by a heavy sleep after an abundant banquet; in Plato's *Republic*, by a presumed death during the journey of Er; in the Ascension of Isaiah, by a sudden interruption of speech, while the body remains inert but continues to breathe and the eyes are open but cannot see. All such phenomena are examples of what we refer to as the detachment of a

40 See the analysis of John 2:22 in Destro – Pesce 2003c.

part of the person. Only some texts say that the intellect (*nous*) or the soul (*psychê*) leaves the body. In Plutarch, the soul filters through the cracks of the head and flies away. In any case, it is this kind of detachment that distinguishes the heavenly journey from prophecy. The individual is deprived of an essential part of her/his self, and her/his state of perception changes. Such detachment, as we have seen, is said to produce a strong physical effect: loss of consciousness, a state between sleep and waking, an inability to understand how the event actually takes place (cf. Plutarch, *The Demon of Socrates*, 22, 590c). Timarchos in the *Demon of Socrates* of Plutarch remains in a state between waking and sleep for a day and an half. In Cicero, by contrast, Scipio sleeps.

If the journey is intended as a performance, one may suppose that the “traveler” is subject to states of marginality and powerlessness, either due to his own inertia or because of external forces, so-called “other-than-human persons” (Hallowell 1975; Harvey 2003, 9–11). The individual practitioner of the celestial journey loses her/his functionality in normal life when this experience takes place. That interruption can be verified by witnesses.

b) The detachment envisages a subsequent return and reunification of the person. The weakening and marginality are followed by reintegration and restoration of the person to full functionality. The return is said to be characterized by a specific physical state, underpinning recovery of normal life (see, for example, the *Demon of Socrates*, 22; 592e). In the *Ascension of Isaiah* the angel says to the prophet: “you will come back in your garment” that is, in your body. In Plutarch, at the end of the journey, Timarchos sees himself lying at the entrance of Trophonius’ crypt, where he was at the beginning. In some cases the presence of witnesses is useful to demonstrate that a return to the normal life has taken place. A witness of the absence of the traveler’s consciousness is also necessary to demonstrate that the journey is actually occurring (see, for example, the *Ascension of Isaiah*). The coming back may be followed by a report by the traveler himself on what he has lived during the journey.

c) The purpose of the journey is to attain knowledge of hidden truths. In other words, the result of the journey is cognitive. It is induced by the desire to understand the supernatural world or by situations of crisis, in which no human explication is thought possible. This is, for example, the case of Parmenides, who receives from the goddess the revelation of a truth that is superior to human intellect.

d) Knowledge can only be obtained—through visions and hearing of voices—by going to inaccessible places in the cosmos. The journey’s motivation is therefore based on a dislocation that is rarely spontaneous or self-induced.

e) A further aspect concerns initiation. In a number of cases the journey has the function of introducing an individual into a group that possesses

distinctive characteristics. This is the case of Timarchos, in Plutarch's *Demon of Socrates*, where he who makes the journey becomes *theios anêr*, a divine man. In Scipio's Dream, the protagonist goes through a ritual of passage in which he gets a fundamental knowledge: those who devote their lives to the good of the republic could, when they die, receive a place in heaven among the great politicians of the past.

In some texts, the journey also has a function of legitimizing a religious figure. This may indicate that, in the group to which the figure belongs, authority depends on heavenly revelations. The organization of their human world is based on supernatural knowledge attained through the journey.

f) The theme of the traveler's bodily transformation during the journey is also widely recurring. It is found, for example, in the *Ascension of Isaiah* (transformation of the Beloved) and in the so-called Gospel of the Savior (transformation of the Savior and the apostles involved in the journey).

All such elements converge towards the confirmation of the hypothesis that in the ancient world the heavenly journey was not only thought possible, but was largely practiced. Through it, many were able to receive the initiation or legitimation necessary for participating in particular aspects of social life. The texts, it is true, speak mainly of single persons, but collective experiences seem not be excluded. In some texts of the early Jesus' followers, for example the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the collective function appears particularly strong. The heavenly journey seems to be characteristic of prophets, who employ it as a mechanism for the construction and legitimation of their group (with specific repercussions on identity).

4 Paul's Heavenly Journey

4.1 *Only Three Heavens?*

A cosmology of only three heavens, similar to that of Lucian, is more probable in Paul than that of seven heavens (as in *Somnium Scipionis* or the *Ascension of Isaiah*). The Coptic *Apocalypse of Paul* ("the Holy Spirit who was speaking [with him] caught him up on high to the third heaven and he passed beyond to the fourth [heaven]", NHC V, 19.20–25) seems to adapt 2 Cor 12:2 to its own cosmology. In the *Testament of Levi* 2–3 (version a), the third heaven is the highest.⁴¹ The *Second book of Enoch* (version A, 3–22) has seven heavens, but

41 See 2: 9–10; 3,4. See Sacchi, 2007, 790–793. In 3:5–8 the text speaks of three heavens under God's heaven. The holy astronomy of the *Testament of Levi* is therefore unclear. It seems that the saints live in the third heaven, which could mean that paradise is located in the

paradise is located in the third (8:1), while the moon and sun are in the fourth (11:1). In the Third Book of Baruch, which visualizes seven heavens, the third is that of the Sun.⁴² Paradise is also in the third heaven in the *Apocalypse of Moses* (*Life of Adam and Eve*) 37.40.

Basically, many scholars agree that the three-heaven cosmology, supposed by Paul, is Mesopotamian⁴³ in origin. The Mesopotamian astronomy influenced various cultural areas, including the Greek one. At least, as a first partial conclusion, we can assert that the presence of a three-heaven cosmology does not confine Paul's statements in 2 Cor 12:2 exclusively within a Jewish environment.

4.2 *Paul's Experience*

The text of Second Corinthians 12:1–4 appears as the narration of a concrete experience of Paul, rather than a purely literary representation. Paul does not report the heavenly journey of some ancient personages. He speaks of his own experience (Thrall, *II*, 775–776; Pitta 2006, 483). “He can date the event: ‘14 years ago’” (Thrall, *II*, 782). The event narrated by Paul must have taken place around the beginning of the Forties, if this part of the Second letter to the Corinthians was written in August–September 56 (Thrall *I*, 1994, 3–77). The text appears as one of the few direct testimonies of a person relating what he has undergone during a heavenly journey. Also to be remembered is that the revelations mentioned in 2 Cor 12:1 belong to the *charismata*, the religious phenomena normally occurring out in Pauline churches (1 Cor 14:6.26) (Pitta 486).

It is likely, although not certain, that the object of Paul's supernatural experiences is Jesus himself. In 12:1 Paul actually speaks of “visions and [...] revelations of the Lord (*kyriou*)”. Is the genitive subjective or objective? Is it the Lord who permits the visions and revelations, or do the revelations have him as their object? We lean towards the latter hypothesis. In this case, if Paul sees the Lord Jesus, must we suppose that his location is paradise? If so, paradise cannot but be the highest heaven, and this means that Paul shares a cosmology of three heavens. Or, is the Lord's location in the third heaven provisional? Is the Lord sojourning in it, while struggling for the final victory (1 Cor 15:24–28)? No element, in our view, allows us to confirm the latter hypothesis.

third heaven. “Le texte primitif du Testament de Lévi ne comporte, en effet, que trois cieux, puisque, selon 1,8, le troisième ciel, dont la hauteur est infinie, ne peut, de toute évidence, être que le dernier” (Philonenko 1987, 836).

42 See the translation of Riaud 1987, 1157.

43 Panaino, 1995, 215–219. See also Bousset 1901; Bieler 1935–36; Reitzenstein 1978; Colpe 1967; Rohde 1966.

Paul's description of his experience is revealing and cryptic at the same time. First and foremost, Paul is aware of two different ways of experiencing, and speaking of the fact of being displaced to the heavens. As A.A. Orlov rightly notes, Paul shows a "knowledge of the two types of ascent, inside the body and also outside it".⁴⁴ Paul does not avoid representing his experience to the Corinthians as if the soul made the journey, while the body stayed on earth, exactly as imagined by Philo. If Philo imagined that the eyes of the soul could contemplate supernatural phenomena, why can we not think that Paul also imagined the soul hearing those unspeakable words? It is possible that Paul was referring to a distinction that was known in Corinth. Resorting to the affirmation that only God knows, he seems to show the intention to avoid a confrontation on this subject. The body is, however, involved in both cases. In the first case, when the journey takes place "outside" or "without" the body, the latter remains on earth, and undergoes modification. In the second, it is the whole body that journeys and its functions are necessarily altered in the otherworldly situation.⁴⁵ The distinction between two opposite possibilities is probably intended to avoid the necessity for any further clarification. A wide range of possible experiences may be included within the two extremes.

In 2 Cor 12:1–4 the double confession of an imperfect knowledge of how the journey came about ("in the body" or "outside/without the body") reveals a complex state of mind that arises during the heavenly journey, in which pure intellectual knowledge is challenged. Paul experiences knowledge in a specific form. He knows that he cannot understand. The affirmation is of key significance precisely because it is repeated twice.

Probably the fact that Paul speaks of his own experience as if it were that of another person is intended to underscore the idea that the subject is governed by a supernatural power. An experience that occurs during a lack of consciousness may easily be attributed to the intervention of superior forces, but consists in any case of an extraordinary alteration of perception. In this latter sense, M. Thrall suggests, that the use of the third person "originally derives from the nature of the experience itself, that is, from the ecstatic phenomenon of self-dislocation" (Thrall 11, 782).

44 Orlov 2005, 183. Schäfer 1984 thinks that both solutions are possible for Paul. See also, Pitta 2006, 489. In 2 Enoch, following Orlov (2005, 182–184), the ascent to the heavens takes place with the body, but this fact represents an evolution in the so-called Enochic tradition.

45 The use of the third person derives from the nature of the experience itself, that is, from the ecstatic phenomenon of dislocation of the ego (Thrall 2000, 782).

Paul's claim that he does *not* know may mean either that his bodily perception was suspended during the experience, or that he underwent a loss of memory. We are very close to Plutarch's description of Timarchos' experience. Paul says that he was "caught (*arpagenta*) up" to the third heaven, meaning that he experienced the heavenly dislocation thanks to external intervention. Paul uses the verb *arpazô*, the same one he uses in 1 Thess 4:17 to describe how living people are carried to heaven at the time of the final resurrection. The theme of being taken up to heaven is also found in the liturgy of Mithra, probably written later on.⁴⁶ Paul does remember, nonetheless, hearing "unutterable words, *arrêtha rhêmata*". As M. Thrall recalls (Thrall 11, 795–796; Lo Russo 2007, 292) these are terms used in Greek texts of initiation rites (cf Herodotus *Hist* v, 83, Euripides, *Bacchae* 11, 471–472). All these remarks lead us to exclude those interpretations that see this passage as a purely literary motif.

We must recall that Pauline churches discussed at length prophetic liturgies (also collective ones) and the passage of First Letter to the Corinthians (2:6–16) explicitly speaks of revelations received by Paul together with a little group of "perfects". This gives further support to our hypothesis on Paul's experiences. It should be noted, however, that while Paul speaks explicitly of prophecy, glossolalia, and *gnôsis*, he nowhere makes reference to the heavenly journey. His transportation to the heavens does not seem to have a function for a collective group. This is not strange since also glossolalia can arise without specific collective function. In some cases, actually, the speaker in tongues does not convey the received revelation to the assembly (1 Cor 14:27–28).⁴⁷

Paul speaks of his heavenly journeys in a narrative passage addressing the *ekklēsia* of Corinth. The passage is polemical insofar as Paul is arguing against preachers who have arrived in Corinth, boasting to be "*hebraioi, israêlitai*, [...] minister of Christ" (2 Cor 11:22–23). But the passage is also apologetic⁴⁸ since Paul refers to his experience also in order to defend his authority with regard to different groups in Corinth.

46 However, the depiction of the grades of initiation and/or of the ascent to heaven in the Mithraeum of Felicissimus in Ostia shows seven heavens. See also the Mithraeum of the Seven Gates.

47 One may legitimately ask whether, among the terms Paul uses to define contact with the supernatural, there are some that apply only to the heavenly journey. But this must remain the object of future research.

48 Paul defends himself in two ways: a) by highlighting his extraordinary career as a preacher, devoted to his mission until death, and, b) by claiming to have had extraordinary revelations and visions "of the Lord" as well as a personal revelation of Jesus.

It cannot be excluded that recourse to the heavenly journey, in an apologetic and legitimating function, might have sprung from the fact that the members of the Corinth *ekklêsia* practiced this type of experience, on account of their connection with a Roman-Hellenistic religiosity. It is, however, also possible that it was the Jewish adversaries who had boasted of such experiences themselves, so that Paul felt it necessary to state that he also was familiar with them.⁴⁹

One may wonder whether the phrase "I know in Christ" (*en christô*) may justify a mystic interpretation of Paul's religiosity. The twentieth-century debate on the question of Paul's possible dependency on a mystic religiosity is quite impressive. The fact of being incorporated "in Christ" places the individual under the direct action of a supernatural entity. Of extreme significance is Paul's theory according to which Christ's power can manifest itself in a situation of weakness:

My grace [it is Christ that speaks] is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness. I [it is Paul that speaks] will therefore boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me (2 Cor 12:9).

Here emerges a religiosity, in which the fundamental objective of a person is to obtain a contact with the supernatural in oneself.⁵⁰ This is possible through the insertion *en christô*. The weakness/strength opposition is formulated in theological terms, but Paul refers to the concrete facts of his life. The weakness of the flesh is exemplified by his autobiographical experiences.

What is the real basis of these theological, mythological or ideological formulations? We can imagine that it lies in placing oneself in a condition of submission and weakness in order to be possessed and elevated by the supernatural power (and obtain revelations, and thaumaturgical or prophetic capabilities). The heavenly ascension seems to be the metaphorical representation of the experience lived by a person who believes s/he was overwhelmed by a supposed supernatural *dynamis*.

49 We can also add that, at a later date, Apuleius locates precisely in Corinth his initiation in Isis' mysteries (in which he seems to have made the experience of the heavenly journey). On the religious relation between Jews, early Jesus' followers and the so-called "pagans", see also Sfameni Gasparro 2002, 61–112.

50 About a definition of the experiences of contact with the supernatural, see chapter Seven of this book.

It would be naive to object that Paul's heavenly journey is not prepared or induced (as in Philo), because it occurs suddenly and by God's work. In 1 Cor 12:1–4, Paul does not reveal how the experience can be obtained, nor describe its content. What he wants to make known is precisely what he says: that he ascended to the third heaven and to paradise; that he was taken there by divine power; that he cannot say whether it occurred inside or outside the body; and that he heard unspeakable words. These four elements were probably of relevance to the Corinthian milieu. Perhaps, Paul's adversaries, *hebraioi* and descendents of Abraham's seed, had had similar experiences. Paul wanted to show that he was not inferior to them. In this case, his reference would be to an experience of a heavenly journey of a Jewish Palestinian type. However, the fact that Palestinian Jewish followers of Jesus may have made such journey, does not reveal anything about the nature of their experiences, and does not tell us at all whether Paul's experiences were the same as theirs. A Hellenized Jew, like Paul, could have experienced the heavenly ascension according to Roman-Hellenistic practices, combined with elements of Jewish religiosity. Finally, it should not be forgotten that Paul is speaking to the inhabitants of Corinth who were manly non-Jews. Seemingly, he presupposes that they know what a journey to the third heaven is. He is also ready to describe his experience to the Corinthians, as if his soul alone made the journey, while his body stayed on earth, exactly as imagined by Philo, within Hellenistic philosophical conceptions and perspectives.⁵¹

We asserted at the beginning of the chapter that an adequate theory of practice gives the possibility of distinguishing a religious performance from its interpretation or conceptual decodification. We must isolate, therefore, the experiential aspect of Paul's journey from the interpretation that he gives of it. Some issues of what Paul underwent emerge rather clearly from his words (2 Cor 12:1–4). Paul describes first of all his own subjective impression to have been submitted to a phenomenon of dislocation. (a) He says that he has been "caught". To be "caught" actually does not correspond to a personal action. It

51 According to Heininger, 2004, 203 some elements are typical of Jewish apocalyptic literature: the aim of the journey is to reach paradise; Paul does not know whether the journey took place with or without the body; and the interest for the multiplicity of heavens (*ibid.*, 192). We remark that these elements are also found in Greco-Roman literature. Neither do we agree with Gooder 2006, 31, who limits himself to comparing Paul's heavenly ascent with Jewish apocalyptic texts alone, or with texts of the "Judeo-Christian tradition." His comparison excludes the *Testament of Abram* and the *Apocalypse of Abram* on the grounds that they do not contain a proper description of the ascent through the heavens; in reality, however, neither does 2 Cor 12:1–3.

is something that happens independently from his/her own will. (b) He seems to perceive this event as a sudden bodily modification. (c) Paul apparently has an exceptional perception as if his body were located in another place or as if a part of himself were transferred elsewhere. When speaking of within/without of the body, Paul seems to presuppose the existence of something different from the body (the soul or the spirit), which can be detached from it. It is through these conceptual distinctions that Paul tries to look closely at the experience he had lived and to explain it.

4.3 *Some Conclusions*

The descriptions of a supposed heavenly ascension must take into account (a) the somatic, bodily experience that marks the beginning of the journey, and (b) the relationship between this bodily experience and the theoretical formulations through which it is represented and culturally accepted in a given situation. Paul, for example, formulates his personal case in terms of rapture or displacement, in terms of opposition between “in the body” and “outside/without the body”, in terms of the three-heavens cosmology, in terms of the ancient and Jewish conceptions of paradise; and, in terms of the pattern of “unspeakable words”. All such elements were comprehensible to his Corinthian addressees because of their Roman-Hellenistic background.

What varies from one situation to another is the function of the experience within the relational context in which the heavenly traveler finds her/himself. Sometimes the journey has a legitimizing function within a group, in other cases it aims to endorse a philosophical or theological conception, or validate a form of social behavior. Elsewhere, it works as an initiation ritual, as an instrument of social and symbolic change.

In conclusion, the heavenly journey is not a stable or unalterable religious form. It has been continuously re-shaped throughout the ancient world. It is no surprise, therefore, that we encounter it among various Jewish groups and, subsequently, among the different groups of Jesus' followers, including those of Paul.

This religious practice should be viewed at the same level as other widespread practices, like sacrifice or prayer. None of them was exclusive to a single religion or religious group. They all were part of the complex and widely utilized instruments available for shaping people's feelings and desires. In each culture, religion and group, the celestial journey was an effective cultural process with varying contents, forms and functions. All these aspects are to be taken carefully into account, without splitting up the continuum through rigid boundaries.

Practices of Contact With the Supernatural: From Jesus to His Followers

One of the fundamental problems in understanding the birth of Christianity (Pesce 2004b) concerns the relationships between the groups of Jesus' followers and Jesus' practice of life, after his death. The continuity or discontinuity between the followers and their leader has often been studied from the doctrinal point of view. By contrast, we investigate this question in terms of the behaviors and, in particular, the practices that enabled contact with the divine world.¹

In early Christian studies, it is the term of prophetism (Aune 1983) that has often been used to group together many cultural practices leading to relations with the supernatural. We are searching for a concept that may embrace a broader range of religious practices and be therefore more respectful of their multiplicity. Some scholars, such as J. Pilch, have used contemporary etic models, including that of altered states of consciousness (Pilch 1993; 1994; 2002; 2004). We prefer to examine the historical cultural characteristics of these early Christian phenomena, looking at their differences and cultural specificity.

Diverse practices concerning extraordinary experiences were widespread among the groups of early Jesus' followers.² The specific question we want to address concerns the origin of these practices. Should we interpret the manifold contacts with the supernatural among the followers, immediately after Jesus' death, as the adoption of cultural forms coming from the surrounding environment? Or, rather, should we hypothesize that Jesus himself was at the origin of such practices?

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- 1 This chapter is the revised version of A. Destro – M. Pesca, "Continuity or Discontinuity Between Jesus and Groups of his Followers? Practices of Contact with the Supernatural", in S. Guijarro-Oporto (ed.), *Los comienzos del cristianismo* (Bibliotheca Salmanticensis. Estudios 284), Salamanca, Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 2006, 53–70 (Destro – Pesca 2006). The paper was first presented at the Salamanca conference organized in June 2004 by Santiago Guijarro. After that date, many studies have been published on the practices of contact with the supernatural in early Christianity (see note 2).
 - 2 Dunn 1975; Aune 1983; Nasrallah 2003; Destro – Pesca 2003c; Destro – Pesca 2007; Filoramo 2005, 151–253; A.D. DeConick 1996; 2001; DeConick (ed.) 2006; Flannery, Shantz and Werline (eds.), 2008; Shantz and Werline 2012.

An answer to this question is often given from a theological presupposition. Taken from this point of view, the experiences of supernatural contact are the result of a direct intervention of God and his Spirit in the life of Jesus and in the first groups of followers. On the contrary, the supernatural experiences attested among other religious groups of Jesus' time would be the result of techniques through which some "sought to attain inspiration by artificial stimulation" (Dunn 1975, 85). We believe that an anthropological and historical analysis will avoid a clear-cut distinction. What we attempt is to highlight the presence of cultural models and techniques in Jesus and in the first followers that were common both to Judaism and Hellenistic religions.

It should not be excluded that the groups of Jesus' followers were convinced that he was a supernatural being, belonging to the divine sphere. This conviction could have led to conceal Jesus' experiences that presupposed a distance between him and the divine world. A divine being has no need of revelations, nor must he seek knowledge and power elsewhere. It is human beings who need them. The quest for revelation in fact originates from the human necessity to communicate with the supernatural realm, in order to obtain guidance and protection in everyday life.

We will concentrate on (a) the use of cultural forms of communication or contact with the divine world³ by Jesus during his life, as presented by the early Christian writers; (b) the understanding and adaptation of these cultural forms in the groups of Jesus' followers after his death; and (c) the continuity or discontinuity between Jesus and the groups of his followers.

Some gospels provide us with episodes in which Jesus enters into contact with the world that their authors considered supernatural. The most important examples that we want to take into consideration are the cases of Jesus' baptism, the temptations in the desert, the transfiguration,⁴ and the voice from heaven (John 12:27–30).⁵ Also Jesus' practice of prayer, his miracles and healings could imply particular moments of supernatural contact. Finally, a series of utterances are attributed directly to Jesus, in which he seems to refer to experiences of divine revelations (cf. Matthew 11:25–27;⁶ Luke 10:18).

3 "The communication of the divine with the human" is the expression adopted by Nasrallah 2003, 1.

4 Dunn 1975, 62–67; Pilch 1994, 57–64; Davies S.L. 1995, 52–65; Ashton 2005.

5 On this text (not analyzed here), Destro – Pesce 2000.

6 The passage in Luke 10: 21–2 // Matthew 11: 25–7 has clear affinities with John 3: 35; 7: 29; 10: 14–5; 13: 3; 17: 2; 17: 25 and 1 Cor 2:6–3:4; see: Pesce 2004a, 510–513. It could be said that the different accounts reflect the array of diverse interpretations of the Jesus nucleus undergone in Paul, Q in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, and in the Gospel of John. The Jesus nucleus has

1 Two Examples of Jesus' Contact with the Supernatural

1.1 *Jesus' Baptism: The Embodiment of the Spirit (Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22; Matthew 3:16–17; John 1:33–34)*⁷

According to the Gospel of Mark, following his immersion in water, Jesus has a vision of the “opening” of the heavens (above which God is situated). He receives in himself the Holy Spirit, and hears a voice. Here, contact with the divine world is clearly obtained through vision, communication of supernatural strength (since the Spirit enters into Jesus) and hearing voices. The supernatural vision occurs not through a celestial journey, but by the opening of the heavens.⁸ The context seems to be of unmistakable ritual nature. The ritual probably envisaged the bodily purification through immersion in water as a first necessary condition for a contact with the supernatural.

If we consider Mark 1:10–11, we can suppose that the vision is experienced only by Jesus, while the voice seems to be heard by everybody.⁹ If this difference could be confirmed, we would have a particular type of ritual, in which some elements (the vision) are of personal nature, while others (hearing voices) seem collective and affecting all those present at the scene. The text of Matthew (3:16–17) substantially coincides, from this point of view, with Mark.¹⁰ The representation of the same episode in Luke accentuates its ritual nature by adding a fundamental element: after his baptism, Jesus prays (Luke 3:21). The characteristics of the relationship with the supernatural found in Mark

two basic characteristics, one saying and one revelatory experience. This double element is maintained in Q, Paulinism and Johannism. Jesus appears to have experienced revelations concerning the nature of God himself and these experiences of supernatural revelation are repeated among the Pauline and Johannine groups (cf. Destro – Pesce 2003c, 95–103).

- 7 In this part, we first examine the embodiment of the Spirit by Jesus at his baptism and his struggle with Satan and, second, the initiation of three disciples in practices of contact with the divine world in the episode of the transfiguration. We do not investigate the historical plausibility of the episodes, but examine their structural role in the cultural imagination of the authors of the texts. Jesus's experiences of contact with the supernatural are also attested in apocryphized gospels like the Gospel of the Hebrews (Pesce 2015; Norelli 2008, 2012).
- 8 Jesus sees the sky open and the Spirit descending towards, or onto, him (some manuscripts, perhaps in harmony with the Gospel of John 1:33, add that the Spirit remains in Jesus).
- 9 In fact, Jesus is the subject of the verb “see”, while it is said, in general, that “a voice came from the skies” (which had just opened).
- 10 Even if it is only explicitly stated that Jesus sees the Holy Spirit, and not also the heavens opening.

are confirmed, but are connected by Luke with Jesus' prayer. This prayer is personal, but has a collective effect. It may be supposed that, according to this account, the baptismal rite included two phases: a first one, in which the body was purified in order to be able to enter a second phase, when contact with the supernatural was actually invoked through a liturgy (based on prayer). Luke seems to presume that both the vision and the divine voice are experienced by all those present, not only by Jesus. He also accentuates a further aspect: the Holy Spirit appears in concrete "bodily" form (Luke 3:22).¹¹ John ("I have seen the Spirit descending from the heavens as a dove, and remaining over him", 1:32) does not mention hearing a voice, but only the vision and the actual descent of the Holy Spirit. John is particularly emphatic on this point, since it states that the Spirit not only descends on Jesus, but also "remains" on him. It is significant that also John the Baptizer, and not only Jesus, has a vision of the Holy Spirit. It is especially interesting that the Gospel of John lets understand that he had received revelations and probably heard a divine voice relating to his role as baptizer (John 1:33). One could also suppose that the affirmation that the Holy Spirit "remains" on Jesus, wants to underline this exceptional case.

It must also be noted that in John the five disciples who follow Jesus (the disciple with no name, Andrew, Simon, Philip and Nathanael), do not seem to have attended the baptism¹² of Jesus.¹³ The four texts examined present different forms of the rite. We find in them cultural patterns at least partly diverging in their way of conceiving the possibility of reacting or contacting the supernatural world. The principal difference concerns Luke, who locates the baptismal experience within a ritual of prayer.

Many questions arise. First, did the vision and descent of the Spirit normally occur during the Baptizer's rite? If so, it would mean that Jesus was introduced to this contact with the Spirit by the Baptizer himself. Second, what degree of historicity can we attribute to this episode? Third, since Jesus' disciples do not seem to have been present at this episode, how was knowledge of the fact transmitted?

At the analytical level, a further question is relevant. How can baptism—implying visions, hearing voices, and the involvement of onlookers—be defined? If we define prophetism as a communication of revelations from God through a human representative to other human beings, not all we find narrated

11 While implicit in the accounts of Mark and Luke, here it is expressly confirmed.

12 They did not have a vision of the Holy Spirit descending and remaining on Jesus, as John the Baptizer did.

13 The Gospel of the Nazarenes suggests that the mother of Jesus and her brothers were present at the rite, cf. Jerome, *Adv. Pelagianos* III 2, 1; see: Pesce 2004a, 99. 602.

in the episode of Jesus' baptism can be defined as prophetism. What is depicted is the descent of the Spirit on a human being, a vision and the hearing of a voice. There is little evidence of prophetic communication in the strict sense.

From our point of view, one central aspect is the entering of the Spirit in Jesus' body. Can this fact be defined as a case of "possession"? The action of the Spirit during the baptismal ritual precedes something else: it heralds a situation of expectation. For this reason, in order to address the question of the definition of Jesus' baptism in terms of "possession," we need to explore the subsequent events of the temptations.

1.2 *The Temptations in the Desert as Consequence of the Entering of the Spirit into Jesus (Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–13; Matthew 4:1–11)*

The Gospel of Mark very briefly narrates what happened to Jesus after his baptism by John:

and immediately the Spirit led him (*ekballei*) to the desert and he was in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts and the angels served him (1:12–13).

Matthew and Luke, both of whom may depend on Q source, provide a detailed account, from which we draw only some main elements: (a) the Holy Spirit leads Jesus to the desert; (b) Jesus fasts for forty days; (c) Satan submits him to three temptations (which the two Gospels do not present in the same order); (d) Jesus seems to suffer two miraculous dislocations by Satan (one onto a high place,¹⁴ the other to the Temple of Jerusalem, Luke 4:9; Matthew 4:5).

What the three versions agree on is that Jesus' removal to the desert was not an action chosen by Jesus himself, but the effect of an impulse of the Holy Spirit received during the baptism. We can therefore initially hypothesize that we are dealing with an act of possession. The Spirit submits Jesus, without Jesus' initiative, to an extraordinarily altered state that seems to last for a long time.¹⁵ During this period Jesus decides to fast, thus clearly placing himself in a condition of *exposure* to contact with the supernatural.

¹⁴ Only some manuscripts of Luke 4:5 speak of a "high mountain", perhaps in harmonization with Matthew 4:8.

¹⁵ Forty days are a measure of strong symbolic value, certainly alluding to a long period, and to a difficult struggle.

For anthropology and history of religions, the first problem to be discussed is whether we are dealing with a possession of Jesus by the *pneuma aghion*.¹⁶ What is described is a physical displacement, in which Jesus is miraculously forced to go into the desert. On the other hand, the narration speaks of a series of visions, in which Jesus sees himself submitted to temptations during the lengthy period of fasting.

The dramatic and unexpected event of being sent into the desert has a clear cognitive significance. According to Mark's Gospel, the Spirit casts (*ekballei*)¹⁷ Jesus into the wilderness. This prompts us to wonder whether the event expresses the dynamics of possession, and in what other way the phenomenon could be defined. The ethno-anthropological literature presents different cases where persons are thrown into a particular physical and mental state as soon as a spirit is supposed to enter in them. Possession provokes trance, dancing, or singing, and the possessed person is supposed to speak in place of the spirit, or the spirit seems to speak through the possessed. To some extent, the possessed operate like the god or the demon, or in their place. They appear unable to express common wishes or normal intentions.

In the Gospel accounts, Jesus seems to be well in control of himself, as demonstrated by the fact that he knowingly converses, defends himself and finally triumphs against Satan. Probably Jesus undergoes an unusual form of behavior that is, however, similar or rather close to possession.¹⁸

From our viewpoint, it is important how dislocations connect with voices and visions while their definitions is of secondary importance. What is significant is the fact that Jesus' dislocation seems to involve an experience of contact with the supernatural that essentially determines his life. His experience is personal and unique, not shared by others.

16 On essential aspects of possession, see Hell 1999, 25–44; Bourguignon 1976; on the religious experiences of Jesus as “possession”, Ashton 2000. 2005.

17 *Ekballei* is a verb expressing a violent action of an external power. It is the same verb used by Mark to describe the action with which Jesus “cast out” demons from the possessed.

18 Ashton also states: “This is an instance of spirit possession, not evidently, in the negative sense in which we often understand it, namely possession by an alien spirit; but rather the experience of being taken over by a benign spirit, identified with the spirit of God. But an actual taking over, nonetheless, in which something or someone other than oneself assumes control” Ashton 2005, 2–3. Like us, Ashton believes that “the appropriate category for understanding the gospel reports of the baptism and temptations is that of spirit-possession”. Ashton maintains that the phenomenology of shamanism helps to explain the initial experience of Jesus: only through a struggle with evil powers and thanks to the aid of superior benign powers he becomes able to undertake his future mission (*ibidem*, 3–4). See now Craffert 2008.

Baptism and temptations may be seen as two parts of the same ritual. First of all, in Mark, immediately after baptism, Jesus is invaded by the Spirit. The importance of the two experiences (immersion in water and invasion of the Spirit) also arises from the fact that they are both placed at the beginning of the so-called public life of Jesus. A second element is that, according to the three Gospel versions, nobody witnesses the temptations in the desert. Thus we could deduce that the accounts in Luke and Matthew are literary amplifications and legendary re-elaborations of an episode, very briefly mentioned in Mark. The episode, in substance, would be deprived of historical reality in Jesus' life. However, this is not the only possible hypothesis. It could be that Jesus himself reported his experience with the Spirit to his disciples, or at least to some of them.¹⁹ A further explanation could be that Jesus' teachings to his disciples included instructions on ways of establishing contact with the supernatural in particular with the Holy Spirit of God.

1.3 *The Transfiguration: Initiation of Three Disciples to Contact with the Supernatural (Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–36; Matthew 17:1–8)*

The Gospels of Mark, Luke and Matthew narrate that one day Jesus decides to climb a mountain, choosing to be accompanied only by a small number of disciples (Pilch 1994, 57–64), namely, Peter, John and James. On the mountain Jesus has a supernatural experience, of which the three disciples are bystanders. He goes through a physical transformation. His face becomes white and resplendent, as do his robes. Subsequently, he comes into contact and converses with two Biblical personages, Moses and Elijah.²⁰ Jesus speaks and is seen and heard by his three disciples (who fail to understand what is said).

By leading three of his followers to an isolated place, Jesus introduces them to the experience in which he himself is the subject of the vision, together with Elijah and Moses. One could view it as a form of communication managed by

19 If we refer, instead, to the criterion of multiple attestations, according to which an event has greater historicity if it is attested by several independent sources, we can state that the episode of the temptations is reported by Q (on which Luke and Matthew's accounts depend) and by Mark. One could, perhaps, add a third source, the Gospel of the Hebrews (Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 15,4; Jerome, *on Michea* 11 7; Jerome, *on Isaiah* XI 24 [to 40:9]; Jerome, *on Ezekiel* IV 16,13), since the sentence "my mother, the Holy Spirit, brought me by one of my hairs..." (the quotation from Origen says that the Holy Spirit brought him onto the Tabor mountain) could allude to the episode of the Holy Spirit leading Jesus into the desert. But this sentence could refer to the transfiguration, or to another event not narrated in the canonical gospels.

20 It might be asked to what extent one may speak of necromancy. Cf. J.Z. Smith 2004, 348–349.

Jesus who imparts certain knowledge to his disciples. The voice that apparently comes from the cloud is directed towards the disciples themselves, and constitutes a form of legitimation of Jesus. The legitimation is also sustained by the presence of Moses and Elijah, and by symbolic elements, such as the cloud that removes sight (Mark 9:7; Matthew 17:5; Luke 9:34) and, in Luke's version, the heaviness of sleep and the splendor of the glory.

Our hypothesis is that the disciples' participation to the event is narrated to show how Jesus actually involves the disciples in his own experience of contact with the divine. The followers personally participate to a supernatural communication, in which the bodily reality is at the center. In this way their participation does not look as a mere intellectual operation.

The importance of this participation should not be underestimated. It elucidates some aspects of the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. Their link cannot be understood if we do not take into account the aim of the gospels to attribute to Jesus intention to introduce at least a small group of his disciples to the practice of supernatural contact. If Jesus leads the three disciples to a place where he experiences an extraordinary event, this most probably means that he wishes to introduce them to his religious practice. The event, shared with some disciples, is part of his teaching. That he chose a very select entourage of followers means that Jesus intentionally foresaw an esoteric level of initiation.²¹ Generally, what is transmitted at such level represents something of great significance.

In substance, the transmission of practices to obtain visions and revelations constitutes a remarkable aspect of Jesus' teaching and part of the construction of the disciples' identity.²² It is worth noting that Jesus' esoteric teaching is represented in many episodes of the Gospels, particularly in Mark.²³

Perhaps we can infer that the transmission of Jesus' experience could not be mediated through normal cognitive channels. Object of the vision is the contemplation of Jesus' transformation,²⁴ of his splendor, and of the fact that God

21 Ashton 2005, 8 also states that Jesus "was eager to enable his most intimate disciples to share in his own mystical experience."

22 It should be emphasized that, according to Luke 9:32,34, the esoteric transmission seems to cause surprise, disorientation and also sleep among the disciples. On this context of transmission, see Rouget 1990, 122–126 also speaks of "dull-wittedness", in the sense of their being dazed and emotionally altered, but not of a real impossibility to assimilate instructions.

23 Mark 3:20–35; 7:17, 24; 9:28, 33; 10:10.

24 Matthew and Mark employ the verb "to be transformed;" Luke writes "he became different."

himself has chosen him. This means that supernatural and hidden aspects of Jesus' identity can only be perceived through exceptional visionary practices.²⁵

1.4 *Powerful Backgrounds*

At this point, it must be asked to which extent all these of contacts with the supreme world belong to the historical figure of Jesus. Or, whether they should be attributed to the way in which the gospels adapted his image to the religious models of certain groups of his followers and/or of their addressees. If the focus of the baptism is the entering of the Spirit into Jesus,²⁶ the question must be: what is the cultural background allowing the author and his readers to understand these elements of Jesus' baptismal ritual?

The answer to this question is that, in first-century Jewish culture, one widespread cultural form (permitting a person to be in contact with the divine world) was the "opening of the heavens". This conception constitutes a well-known traditional cosmological imaginary (Gen 7:11; Isa 64:1; 24:18; Ezek 1:1; John 1:51; Acts 10:11; Rev 4:1).

This kind of cosmology implies that God, and the whole entourage of beings connected with him, are situated above the skies. As is widely documented, the skies are considered to be thick, closed layers, overlapping each other (e.g. for instance, *The Ascension of Isaiah* 6–11).²⁷ Descriptions of extraordinary or legendary human beings ascending towards God or descending to earth, or visions from below of what was happening above in the skies, always involved an opening of the heavens. The sight of this opening is therefore an absolutely essential cultural feature, guaranteeing the divine origin of what occurs in a ritual experience. Only by contemplating the opening heavens can people be certain that what descends on Jesus is the Spirit, that the voice everybody hears is of divine origin and is proclaiming Jesus' dignity.

25 After the publication of the study presented in this chapter, we came to the conclusion that also prayer, exorcisms, miracles and some aspects of Jesus preaching activity, should be taken into consideration as sources for understanding the modalities by which Jesus tried to connect himself with the divine world (Pesce 2016).

26 The rite contains a vision and hearing of a voice, which are part of the process of the "inhabitation" of the Spirit in him. The procedure or mechanism implied in the gospel accounts is similar to that of possession. Cf. Hell 1999, 25.

27 *The Ascension of Isaiah* is a source of knowledge of the cosmological conceptions associated with the celestial journey, and of an important phase of Christian prophetism. Perhaps A1 6 contains the fullest description available to us of a prophetic ecstasy in an early Christian context (cf. Pesca, 1983; P. Bettolo, – A. Kossova, – C. Leonardi, – E. Norelli, – P. Perrone [eds.], 1995).

A second question concerns the relationship between the entering of the Spirit into Jesus and the struggle with the evil spirit of Satan in the episode of the temptations. It is well known that, in ancient religions, contact with the divine is normally considered dangerous. In certain cases, such contact must be controlled through formally ritualized actions. Only within a ritual can the subject, exposed to spirits or super-human powers, perform gestures that may be beneficial to him/herself or to others.²⁸ Through the ritual, the supernatural power may be rendered harmless for the human beings and the ordinary world.

If the question is considered in personalized terms, it can be said that, in these situations, the subject aspires to become what he vaguely perceives to be. Once contact with the spirit is obtained, the subject can more clearly know him/herself. Through a dramatic and prolonged struggle, the person possessed by a benign power (in the case of Jesus, the Holy Spirit) can expel all negative elements of his latent identity and exalt all the positive ones. The individual is placed in a controlled situation in which contrasting or opposing forces, holy and evil spirits,²⁹ confront each other. Whoever submits to a ritual of this type may reach her/his own identity and assume a public positive role.

In Jesus' case, his baptism and his temptations are strictly connected. Jesus' experience during his baptism brings about precise effects. Without the scene of the temptations, the effectiveness of the baptismal ritual would not be complete, and the process itself would not be concluded. The Gospel of Mark narrates the two scenes with no break in continuity, representing in this way a ritual unity.³⁰

The evangelists represented the experience of Jesus by modeling it according to ritual forms that were known to them (and the theological expectations of their time) choosing specific mechanisms such as contact with the Spirit, the struggle against demonic powers, and rituals of prayer. In this way, they imply the continuity between their own practices of contact with the

28 Cf. references to Bastide, Metreaux and Laplantine in Hell 1999, 31–32.

29 According to Rouget (1990, 290), the evil spirit does not produce possession, but "obsession. There exists, however, a competition between the evil and benign spirits: where one is, the other cannot be". Rouget refers to the case of 1 Sam 16: 14–17). In his interpretation of the story of Saul, Rouget at times speaks of prophetic "trance," especially in reference to the use of music (David plays), at times of an act of healing, or again of a means "to raise the presence of God" (*ibidem*, 290–295).

30 Guijarro 2004, 36–37, underlines this connection also at the level of the Q source. The Gospel of Luke, on the other hand, at least apparently interrupts this connection by introducing a genealogy (another parallel way of underlining identity) and emphasizing the caesura with a sentence in which Jesus leaves the Jordan (Luke 4:1).

supernatural and those that they presumed were employed by Jesus. Their accounts suggest awareness of similarities between the rituality of the early groups of Jesus and the practices of Jesus himself.

The episode of the transfiguration allows us to reflect more deeply on the problem of continuity/discontinuity between the leader and his followers. Mark and Matthew do not offer any significant explanation of the transfiguration of Jesus' body and robes. Luke, by contrast, reconstructs the story by introducing specific elements. Only his account states that the three disciples saw Jesus' glory (*doxa*) and that of Moses and Elijah. One could therefore suppose that Luke wishes to interpret the shining face and robes of Jesus as a demonstration of Jesus' nature, of his *doxa*. Since the three texts do not mention any supernatural intervention as the explicit cause of Jesus' transformation, the event could have been interpreted by these Gospels either as a momentary situation or as witness of a hidden intimate quality of Jesus, which comes to the surface in this case. Perhaps the Gospel writers think that this extraordinary quality was received by Jesus at the baptism, even if they do not affirm that the cause of the transformation in the episode of the transfiguration is the Holy Spirit. The scene of the transfiguration, in any case, introduces at least one element of continuity with the baptism, since the voice from above practically communicates the same content ("You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased", Mark 1:11; "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Mark 9:7).

What is important is that the transfiguration is one of the events that testify a possible transmission of practices of supernatural contact from Jesus to his disciples. Jesus brings Peter, James and John on the mount in order not only to assist but also to participate to what he does. They observe how Jesus gets a supernatural contact, how he is transfigured and is hearing the revelations directed to him. They learn and undergo an extraordinary event.³¹

The fact that in Luke (9:31) Moses and Elijah explain to Jesus what was to happen in Jerusalem, means that, this Gospel imagines that Jesus had received a revelation during the transfiguration. Only Luke states that Jesus climbs the mountain *to pray*. He is the only one to mention the content of Moses' and Elijah's revelations. Luke is also the only one who affirms that the three disciples

31 They simply observe, and cannot escape from the revelation. The person who has prompted and received the vision is Jesus, not Peter, John and James. Practices such as these may have been perceived among early Christian groups as signs of continuity and/or even in terms of the "promise of continuity" (cf. John 1:50–51; 16:13–15) (but cf. also 16:26 and 14:16–17).

had a vision of Jesus' *doxa*.³² Probably Luke reinterpreted the event in the light of the liturgical experiences of the primitive groups of Jesus' followers.

2 Continuity of Ritual Practice From Jesus to His Followers

2.1 *The Gospel of Luke*

The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles present a ritual pattern or model in which the act of praying brings about supernatural revelations that manifest themselves during the prayer itself, or during a ritual in which it has a substantial function.

We remarked above that it is typical of Luke to introduce the prayer in scenes in which Mark and Matthew do not mention it. In particular, this happens in the scenes of the baptism and transfiguration:

now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased (Luke 3:21–22).

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white (Luke 9:28–29).

In both cases, mentioning the activity of praying may be redactional. However, the same pattern is encountered when Luke describes early Christian ritual scenes, and not only when he describes episodes that concern Jesus. It becomes difficult to argue that Luke makes use of a mere literary pattern without reference to actual early Christian rituals. It is more probable that Luke reflects a pattern widespread among early followers. It is obviously possible to

32 1 Pt 1.11 attributes to the biblical prophets the prediction of both the *pathemata* of Jesus and his future glories (*doxas*); John 12:41 says that Isaiah saw the glory (*doxa*) of Jesus, a statement connected to Isaiah's celestial journey narrated in the Ascension of Isaiah 6–11. It therefore seems that Luke interprets this event as a vision (perhaps a celestial journey, in which the three disciples have a vision of Jesus' celestial glory), but also an endorsement and legitimation of the "Christological" interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures, since Elijah and Moses have foreknowledge of Jesus' passion and glory. Cf. Pesce 2004a, 46–50.

deny historical reliability to Luke, but only when he presents textual internal discrepancies, or contradictions with respect to other early Christian writings. In 6:12–13 Luke writes:

Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles.

The experience narrated by Luke in 6:12–13 presents a complex ritual process consisting of different stages. (a) *The dislocation*: consisting of Jesus' climbing the mountain and detaching himself from the everyday environment. We must be aware that even the climbing is part of the ritual action. (b) *The choice of a marginal place*: the mountain is not an institutional place of ritual, but rather, is considered symbolically significant as a place of manifestation of God. (c) *Solitude*: this implies an altered social, psychological and corporeal state, a marginal and non-institutional situation. (d) *The time*: night, which implies suspension of the normal daily activities. (e) *The exceptional duration* of the prayer. (f) *A decision* taken as consequence of the prayer *and of a revelation* eventually obtained in it (in this case the decision taken by Jesus after praying consists of the choice of the Twelve, which is part of the ritual action). (g) Finally, the *return down* to the plain to *a situation of normality*, but with a changed status. The new situation consists in the fact that now Jesus is surrounded by the Twelve (6:13).

In his Luke commentary F. Bovon affirms that the prayer of Jesus is a prayer to God, *prosecute tou thou*. His expression embraces the requests and silences of Jesus and the response of God. What is involved—in the mind of Luke—is a revelation by God to Jesus of what he did not know and wanted to know. Bovon sees Jesus' prayer as an intercession. For Luke, the structural elements of Jesus' prayer are: the expression of the relationship with God, that is worship; then the request and the intercession for the accomplishment of God's redeeming plan. Now, the redactional character of the phrase—"he went on the mountain to pray and spent the night in prayer" is not in doubt (Bovon 2002, 206–207). Luke's narrative is certainly not an eyewitness account. Who, then, were the informants who reported this account to Luke? And what reliable information did they have regarding the facts they reported? Or must we consider the phrase to be a purely literary element with no basis in the religious practice of Jesus? We think that the correct exegetical question can be formulated as follows: what model of prayer and religious experience allowed Luke to imagine that Jesus spent the night in prayer? Had Luke seen people pray all the night before taking a very important decision?

Bovon looks for literary models in Philo's *Life of Moses*, where Philo stresses the 40 days of Moses in the desert during which he received revelation of mysteries, especially concerning priesthood and the sanctuary. Moses' choice of the 12 explorers, the priests and the Levites, draws our attention to the preparation for the choice of priests that takes place in prayer, to which we find a parallel in Luke. The *Antiquitates Biblicae* of the Pseudo-Philo are especially important for Bovon: following the infidelity of the people, Moses goes up the mountain a second time and prays (12:8). It is this second promulgation of the commandments that should be compared with Luke 6:12–16, and not the revelation and the gift of the law on Sinai, because it is here that the themes of the mountain and prayer are combined, and preliminary sanctification of the people is not required (Bovon 2002, 208).

Essentially Bovon believes that the model followed by Luke is a literary one. It seems, however, that Bovon considers as redactional only the prayer model on the mountain while Jesus' prayer is a historical fact. Indeed, Bovon claims that Jesus' model of prayer is constitutive also for the prayer of individual Jesus' followers (Luke 11:5–13; 18:1–14 etc.) and their groups (e.g. Acts 1:14; 4:24–31).

Thus, if Luke does not only refer to a literary model, it must be because he considered it quite plausible that Jesus had similar radical experiences. Where did he draw this conviction from? Luke would have not described episodes of supernatural revelation during a prayer without a real experience of prayer rituals held by early Jesus' followers.

2.2 *The Scenario of the Acts of the Apostles*

If we examine some passages of the Acts, for example 13:1–3; 10:1–16; 4:23–31, we encounter a complex model of rituality, in which (a) prayer is presented in a clearly ritual context, which has (b) the purpose of establishing contact with the divine world, and (c) the aim of obtaining the intervention of the supernatural world in the form of visions, verbal communications, or bodily transformations. The ultimate goal, in any case, is that of arriving at a decision.³³

33 Acts 3:1 writes: "One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at the ninth hour." Here the model presents an additional element: the relation with the Temple and the sacrificial action that takes place in it at fixed times (see, for example, the morning and evening sacrifices in Es 2:39.41; Num 28:4.8; Lev 6.; 2–6; Josephus, *Ant.* 14.65). In this case, it is particularly important that the prayer is performed in the Temple after the evening sacrifice, cf. Dan 9:20–21: "While I was speaking, and was praying and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God on behalf of the holy mountain of my God. While I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen before in a vision, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice". On the connection between prayer and sacrifice, see

In the case of Cornelius' vision (Acts 10:1–6), one must suppose that it takes place while he was praying, insofar as he “prayed constantly to God”, as is confirmed by verse 30:

Cornelius replied, “Four days ago at this very hour, I was keeping the ninth hour of prayer in my house, when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me.”³⁴

The vision of Peter in Acts 10,9–16 also occurs during an individual³⁵ prayer, which however Peter does not undertake in order to obtain a revelation. During the prayer, what the text calls *ekstasis*³⁶ occurs spontaneously: the heavens open and Peter sees a sheet—full of beasts, considered impure by the book of the *Leviticus*—descending to earth. In this case, the function of the vision is related the question if it is permitted to eat impure food or not. The solution is found thanks to a revelation of extraordinary importance: “What God has purified, you must not call unclean.”³⁷ A decision on this matter would have been impossible without supernatural vision and legitimation.

also Jdt 9:1. Cf. Loisy 1920, *ad locum*; Marguerat 2007, 117. Hamm 2003, 215–231. If historically trustworthy, *Mishnah Tamid* 5:1 shows that also the *Shema'* together with the related benedictions and the proclamation of the Ten Commandments was part of the sacrificial liturgy. *Mishnah Tamid* 7:4 lists the Psalms sung at the end of the sacrificial service, which therefore implied prayer. The Acts, telling that Peter and John went to prayer on occasion of the evening sacrifice, presuppose that they were participating in a sacrificial liturgy in which pray was also part of a complex of ritual actions. However, we do not have evidence that the prayer of Jesus was ever connected to this liturgy.

34 Also probable is the connection between the hour of the revelation and the hour of the sacrifice in the Temple of Jerusalem. If this second relation were also taken into account by the author of the Acts, we could think that in his mind the vision takes place suddenly during a prayer performed in connection with the sacrifice in the Temple of Jerusalem. Codex D and other manuscripts—following Nestle-Aland 28th edition apparatus—show an interest in the relations between prayer, fasting, and a fixed time.

35 The fact that the revelation is made to an individual and not to a group in collective liturgy does not appear to disconcert the redactor of the Acts.

36 The account in the Acts of the Apostles suggests that the redactor has knowledge of and interest in phenomena of dislocation, states of alteration defined as *ekstasis*. Philo, *Her.* 69–70 links dislocation with the abandonment of the body of the possessed and corybants, as noted by Nasrallah 2003, 38. On ecstasy in Philo in the context of Greek, Jewish and early Christian culture cf. Ead., 36–44.

37 In Acts, the confirmation of the validity or certainty of a revelation is attained through a mechanism of convergence among a plurality of revelations, each one confirming the other: that of Cornelius and that of Peter (as also occurs in Acts in the case of Paul's vision).

It cannot be mere chance that the times indicated in the Acts for prayer and revelation coincide with those designated for the sacrifices held in the Temple. Furthermore, if the author of the Acts is also the author of the Gospel of Luke, it would be really surprising if he did not have in mind that the ninth hour was the time of Jesus' death (which was in turn related to the hour of the sacrificial ritual in the Temple of Jerusalem). Did the author of the Acts think there was a relationship between vision and sacrifice, like the one existing between sacrifice and divination in the Roman religion? Whatever the case, in Acts 10:1–16, the prayer takes place at a specific time and is associated with revelations mediated by sudden voices and visions during the prayer itself.

The passage of Acts 13:1–3 describes a collective rituality:

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Five qualified people, such as doctors and prophets, are involved.³⁸ The entire procedure is characterized by two practices: prayer and fasting.³⁹ This may suggest that the revelation of the Holy Spirit and its contact with humans is caused (and permitted) by prayer when the human body has been submitted to a long fast. It seems likely that fasting is employed to attain a state of trance. In turn, the trance prompts a particular ability, a psychic perception. During the rite, at a moment that remains unspecified (although understood to be sudden) the Holy Spirit is manifested as a voice, a vocal command: "separate for me Barnabas and Saul for the work for which I have called them". The revelation is followed by a second act, which has as its ritual focus the laying of hands on Barnabas and Saul, which also involves fasting and prayer. It therefore seems, in all probability, that the author of the Acts had in mind a model corresponding to a practice carried out in some groups of Jesus' followers.⁴⁰

38 Although the possibility cannot be excluded that the lack of mention of other participants may imply a liturgy of far larger proportions.

39 The element of fasting confers a special duration on the rite, thus also implying its preparation.

40 Acts says that the rite took place in Antioch, a city that other early Christian sources (cf. Ascension of Isaiah; Didachè) mention as being strongly characterized by phenomena that could be defined as prophetic. According to this model, the manifestation of the Holy Spirit is intentionally and carefully sought by means of collective rites.

A conclusion that can be drawn is again that revelations are required in order to take important decisions and in situations of uncertainty. The supernatural intervention must be verifiable (in the form of voices, words, visions) and experienced collectively. Thus, the groups of Jesus' followers appear not to distinguish themselves very much from the Roman-Hellenistic divination,⁴¹ even if their beliefs and religious forms were different.

Recourse to revelations, whether within a ritual or not, could also be explained by the lack of an accepted set of norms.⁴² It is relevant to highlight that it could be motivated by the fluid situation of a religious movement that was in a process of consolidation, and that did not confer absolute value to the Judaic religious institutions.

It emerges from the ritual of Acts 13:1–3 that an élite group of prophets and teachers (*profētai kai didaskaloi*) was responsible for obtaining supernatural knowledge and legitimacy, and for taking decisions deriving from that knowledge. This would seem to reflect a phase in the history of the groups of followers of Jesus, in which experts in contact with the supernatural (sometimes generically called prophets) maintained a fundamental role in the decision-making process. The question that arises is whether this characterized a particular phase in early Christian history, or merely some geographical and cultural zones.

In Acts 4:23–31, once again, we are dealing with (a) a collective liturgy of prayer that (b) has the purpose of attaining supernatural intervention, and that (c) actually succeeds in achieving it:

When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness (4:31).

2.3 *Pauline Groups*

In Paul and his “churches” we encounter another historical scenario, which confirms that phenomena of contact with the supernatural were very common. Paul himself considered them essential. According to him, all baptized people have access to the Holy Spirit, to the revelations of Jesus and of God. He considers a duty to try to obtain some particular gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:31: “strive for the greater *charismata*”; 14:39: “be eager to prophesy”). He seems to know different forms of supernatural manifestations.

41 Nasrallah 2003, 1–60, 197–204; J.Z. Smith 2004, 240–261.

42 A further reason is the absence of a normative reference point in Jesus' own words.

We treat, however, very briefly Paul's letters because they may not contain evidence of continuity between the forms of contact with the supernatural practiced by Jesus and those of the Pauline churches. Paul was not a disciple of Jesus and he did not know him. In his letters we do not find, in fact, a description of the religious experiences of Jesus.

The practices of contact with the supernatural we find in Paul can be classified in three cases. (a) Some of the phenomena occurred in public assemblies during collective rituals (cf. 1 Cor 12–14); (b) others supernatural manifestations were reserved to a selected entourage (1 Cor 2:6–16), even if Paul does not clearly state how and where they occurred; finally, (c) others had an individual, and non-liturgical character (2 Cor 12:1–7).

We can not examine this wide range of phenomena. We limit ourselves to a few observations on the experiences of individual character. It is known that the whole life Paul is determined by revelations that he personally received.⁴³ He became a follower of Jesus thanks to a revelation and often his decisions are taken in reaction to revelations (Gal 1:12, 15; 2:2). Among them, he includes the heavenly journey to the third heaven of which we have already spoken.⁴⁴ This confirms that contact with the heavenly Jesus is judged fundamental by Paul, and probably constitutes the apex of the Pauline form of religiosity.

It is worth noting that the comparison between Paul and Jesus seems to throw light on some elements of continuity and sometimes of discontinuity. In Jesus' and Paul's experiences, we find revelations of individual nature (the baptism of Jesus and the heavenly journey of Paul), along with others that have at least some esoteric and initiatory aspects, such as the transfiguration, or the revelations of the Spirit to Paul and to some "perfect" members of the Pauline groups (1 Cor 2:6–3:4). However, the scenes of collective prophetic revelations, partially described in 1 Cor 12–14, do not appear in Jesus' experience. Jesus' baptism, temptations and transfiguration do not actually have a prophetic nature, because they do not consist in a public transmission of a received revelation. In the case of the transfiguration, at least according to Mark, what happened is so clearly non-public that Jesus feels the necessity to forbid his followers to divulgate news about the event.

2.4 *The Johannine Imagination*

We present only a summary of the results of our previous researches on Johannine texts.⁴⁵ The Johannine prophetism is based on a transmission of the

43 Destro – Pesce 2011c, 167–200.

44 See chapter 5.

45 Destro – Pesce 2003c, 104–105.

Spirit, perceived as a supernatural source of knowledge that goes beyond the Scriptures and the words of Jesus himself. In John, there are indications allowing us to hypothesize: (a) the cultural context of the experience of contact with the divine; (b) an ecstatic-prophetic experience taking the form of heavenly journey; (c) a hermeneutic technique, which seems to imply a school activity; and (d) the production of a text as an expression of prophetic activity.

It is a fact that in John the title of prophet is *explicitly* attributed to Jesus (4:19-44; 6:14; 7:40.52; 9:17). John underlines that Jesus communicates his prophetic ability to the disciples through the transmission of the Spirit (20:19-23). Therefore the Johannine groups apparently conceive themselves in continuity with the prophetism of Jesus.

We could perhaps add that, in John, there is a branching out into three temporal and structural phases: the time of Jesus, the time of the beloved disciple, and the time of the Johannine prophets. While, in the first two phases or levels, the search for a supernatural knowledge has a character of exceptionality, in the third, Johannine prophetism appears as a significant experience of a group, and probably of all the members of the group. It appears as a “school” phenomenon, with its own hermeneutic methods and analytical procedures, applied to the words of Jesus and the Scriptures. At this level, we find an internal struggle within the Johannine movement, between a prophecy that is considered true, and one that is judged false.⁴⁶

2.5 *Conclusive Observations about Continuity from Jesus to his Followers*

Our initial question was whether it was possible to identify elements of continuity and discontinuity between Jesus and the groups of his followers after his death, in terms of cultural forms or religious practices (visions, possessions, embodiment of the Spirit, etc.). The results of the enquiry on Jesus’ baptism, temptations in the desert, and transfiguration, suggest that—leaving aside the evolution undergone in the gospel narratives—they were part of a large nucleus of practices of supernatural contact. A first explanation could consist in attributing to these experiences of Jesus, a high level of historical probability. In this case, they were absolutely fundamental for Jesus and for the formation of his religious identity, so that, in different ways, Jesus introduced a few of his disciples to the practice of such religious forms.

46 Alongside the prophets, “pseudo-prophets” also appear (cf. 1 John 4:1-3). This means that the dependency on prophetic revelations, among the different Johannine groups in conflict with each other, led to accusations of false prophecy among rival prophets. In this third phase, Johannine prophetism created, above all, a text endowed with authority. It is the text that, in many ways, defines the Johannine group and provides its justification.

In other cases, Jesus experienced supernatural phenomena in total solitude. However, these personal events may have been the subject of his own narratives. Were this the case, the historical disciples could find in Jesus himself the model of those practices, which later became widespread among many early groups of his followers.

However, a second explanation may exist. Leaving aside the question of the absolute historicity of the narratives about Jesus' experiences and of whether or not he himself initiated his disciples in this kind of experiences, the fact remains that the early groups of followers transmitted an image of Jesus in which the quest for the embodiment of the Spirit, visions, and revelations through divine voices, were essential elements. It is like to say that it constituted a fundamental model of inspiration and imitation among his followers. Finally, some Jesus' experiences were considered similar, for example in Luke, to the prophetic practices of the groups of followers with which Luke was familiar. That bears additional witness in favor of the hypothesis of continuity.

In our analysis we have tried to shed light on continuity above all in terms of cultural mechanisms, and less in terms of religious doctrine. What bound the early groups of followers to Jesus was often a series of cultural acts, more than the content of the teaching. If the disciples learned practices and behaviors from Jesus, it is easier to understand how each group, or even each prophet, would feel directly legitimated by the Spirit, rather than by the transmission of a doctrine. This type of cultural experience explains, at least in part, the divergencies among early Jesus' groups. Direct access to the supernatural confers independence and diversity. Each group had its own truth of divine origin.⁴⁷

Certainly, elements of discontinuity existed. The forms in which the groups of Jesus' disciples sought contact with the supernatural presented many variations, precisely in terms of cultural processes. For example, the celestial journey was important in some prophetic circles, as witnessed by the Ascension of Isaiah or the Gospel of John.⁴⁸ A further point of discontinuity in the texts of the early Jesus' followers is often represented by the collective pattern that contacts with supernatural appear to assume. Paul lists the prophetic gifts, (stating the reasons for aspiring to them) and he makes himself the repository of

47 This may explain not only the diversity, but also a certain lack of flexibility and the ensuing rise of internal conflicts. It can therefore be understood how plurality, whether prophetic, charismatic or of any kind, at some point provoked a backlash against phenomena and practices seeking contact with the divine sphere, leading to an increasing urge to found oneself rather on a continuity of doctrinal elements and common practices (at least in certain geographic and cultural zones) cf. Destro – Pesce 2007.

48 Pesce 2003a; Destro – Pesce 2003c.

unutterable words that confer him a special condition. At Antioch *didaskaloi* and prophets, as part of a communal liturgy, supernaturally endorse their envoys, conferring on them functions and visibility within the group. Conversely, in the gospels there is scarce trace of collective experiences of a prophetic or visionary nature in which Jesus and his disciples were involved, with the exception of the transfiguration.

A final, but by no means secondary, cause of diversity in the practices may also lie in the fact that the Roman-Hellenistic world in which the groups of Jesus' followers proliferated, was itself familiar with a variety of contacts with the divine sphere.⁴⁹ They may have been an inevitable source of cultural contamination and hybridization, which distanced Jesus' followers from the practices carried out by him.

49 See the following chapter and Destro – Pesce 2011b, 2011c; Nasrallah 2003, 1–60, 197–204.

PART 3

*Different Groups of Jesus' Followers, before
Christianity*



The Places of Jesus' Followers in the Land of Israel: Local Origins of the Gospels' Sources

What was the location of the first groups of Jesus' followers in the Land of Israel after his death?¹ An answer to this question has not yet been comprehensively given. We believe that some statements of the gospels permit to reconstruct a plausible map of places of Jesus' groups in the period from 30 to 70 CE.

Our basic hypothesis is that the gospels contain illuminating traces of the localities from where the information of the evangelists originated. We try to understand *where* the information contained in the gospels came from. In substance, it is the local provenance of the pre-gospels materials that is at the center of our attention.

It is well known that pre-gospels materials are rarely available independently from their utilization in the gospels.² We are conscious that it is extremely difficult to reconstruct their characteristics, functions and whereabouts. We are convinced that recent research on spatiality offers renovated tools of investigation. It permits to highlight the relation between gospels narratives and the local origins of their information.

In these pages we depend on contemporary anthropological and sociological research about the cultural meaning of space (Ingold 2004ab; Augé 1994, 149–72; Id. 1992; Destro 2002; Tuan 1977; Bourdieu 1986; Lefebvre 1991; Soja 1989; Law and Lawrence-Zunigais 1986).³ Among them, the theoretical patterns of T. Ingold and M. Augé are particularly useful for our investigation.

Speaking of cultural ecology, the anthropologist T. Ingold sees humans as living organisms and agents within a vital organic-physical environment (alongside other living beings). Human beings are integral parts of such environment and are constantly participating in its existence. Everywhere they

1 This chapter is a revised version of a paper presented at the conference of the Context Group organized at the Theological Faculty of Stellenbosch by Ernest Van Eyck (July 1–2, 2014) and rewritten in our book *Il racconto e la Scrittura* (Destro – Pesce 2014b, 81–136).

2 Before 180 CE there is no clear “Christian” archeological data that permit to locate exactly and indubitably groups of Jesus' followers (Tabbernee 2013; Strange 2007, 710–741; Carletti 2008). We have at disposal only information coming from literary documentation.

3 See also Gupta and Ferguson 1997a, 1997b; Fardon 1990; Hauser-Schäublin and Dickhardt, 2003.

create and practice spaces. A place is not something existing previous to its use. It does not exist in itself. We agree with M. Augé that any place is simultaneously a “principle of sense” (a concrete or intellectual instrument) for those who inhabit it and a “principle of intelligibility” for those who observe it (Augé 1992, 68). It is precisely this intelligibility of spaces that must underpin the reading of texts.

Occupying a space and dwelling in it is a primary, permanent and necessary human dimension, which manifests itself in a multiplicity of actions and strategic representations (images, words, narratives, writings, etc.). Within this perspective, places and their meanings become more eloquent: for instance, a house is a container of human activities, a road is a route followed by travelers, a field is a place where agricultural work takes place.⁴

Addressing the questions mentioned by Ingold, we briefly emphasize some points in order to illuminate the link between humans and spaces. Individual decisions and participations (even those socially predetermined) are always relevant and influential in the construction of places. Any human agent is the instrument through which spaces are selected, recognized as appropriate. One could say that a field does not exist, unless people dedicate themselves to specific agricultural activities. The same may be true of dwellings. Without human occupation and use of particular spaces there is no village or settlement. It is exactly through people's engagements in a given space that we can understand identity and historical traits of places, their exact extent and cultural relevance.

Seen from the other side, it is incontrovertible that a person “without space” (or without a right to space) does not exist and cannot be imagined. It is generally agreed that it is impossible to reduce the vital space of human beings under a certain minimum. Lack of space challenges the possibility to operate as humans. In other words, we understand a human being essentially through its presence in a precise site. Each human being has its connection/dependence within inevitable spatial limits.

It is in specific spaces that people seek an order, a reason, and a stable pattern of life (De Certeau 1984, 1998). It is often through symbolization (and sometimes stereotypizations and inventions) of particular places (mountains, rivers, urban or rural sites) that the individual searches for the meaning of existence.

4 This point of view is close to the first principle—concerning spatial practice—of Lefebvre 1991. The other two principles, representation of space and representational space (with its codes), are not applied in our discourse.

Consequently, it is inconceivable to separate representations or notions, and activities of individuals and groups from their material location.⁵ In conclusion, if any human activity needs a reference to a space, a spatial dimension is essential also to any narrative. If so what does it mean when a narrative attributes a spatial base to individuals or human groups? In particular, what does the mention of localities mean in the gospels narratives concerning Jesus?

We are obviously aware of the importance of social construction of spaces, of their centrality in ordinary life (Lefebvre 1991; Soja 1989). In our discourse, however, we are limiting our observation to the necessary interdependence between texts and spaces. Our attention is directed to the essential embedment of narrative materials (narratives, oral reports, account, etc.) in spaces and places. Our focus is concentrated especially to the mention of places within the narrative.

Within the writings of early Jesus' followers, we intend to analyze specific agents "in their places": groups of followers, preachers, narrators, and writers. Each of them has different bounds with environment. Our analysis intends to show the importance to locate narrators and narratives in their spatial ground, their structural background. In particular, we focus on the spaces and localities in which they are told to be coping with certain local beliefs and conditions. We are convinced that these agents (oral narrators and authors of the gospels) are often involved in the implicit or explicit representation of places. In other words, each place they mention or apparently have in mind may be a precious element of their voluntary or occasional documentary work.

We believe that to deal with gospels and pre-gospels materials surely implies a distinction between the places in which the events occurred, those in which they were put together and narrated, and those where they were reported in a written composition.

We are not discussing the use of space in the gospels, or the way in which the authors of the gospels present spatially Jesus' activity. We intend to

5 Bachelard 1961; Tuan 1977. Also urbanistic studies illustrate the necessary link between human beings and the spaces they inhabit and where they act. Kevin Lynch, urbanist and architect, speaks of human body as "a navigational apparatus". "This body is dependent on an environment in which s/he can find meaning in order to survive. The foundation of her/his work is neither abstract space, nor an idea or concept. It is the necessity of a mobile organism to orient itself in space. Imagination becomes indispensable in order to find meaning within this world. An image develops in the mind of the individual, partly as a result of what is presently visible (perception) and partly as a result of the memory of past experiences" (Gotsch 2001, 7). Convergent theoretical observations also emerge from Greimas semiotics as is underlined by Leoni 2013, 4. Within Greimas' methodology, space may be analyzed as articulation and topological reflex of the narrative structure.

concentrate on the mention of places and spaces in pre-gospels materials as symptoms of the localizations of groups of Jesus' followers after his death.⁶

Dealing with the gospels, we must take into account any minuscule allusion to spaces, any variation about them. Insufficient details, or lack of specific names of place are also important and impose methodological accuracy. Also the silence of texts about spaces requires careful explication. It is worth noting that some images or metaphors may correspond to spaces only indirectly.

1 First Triangle: Places of the Transmitter, of the Authors, of the Listener

The primary focus of our analysis concerns the areas where the source of information used by the gospels were collected and selected. It is the relation between such information and its place of origin that is at the center of our attention. We are aware that the areas of origin of gospels sources generally do not coincide with those of their transmission and with the places where the gospels were composed. They are geographically and culturally distinct, albeit often intersecting.

Our basic presupposition is that individuals constantly represent their territory through "mental maps" (Gould and White 1986). This means that each individual may possess a personal vision or mental topography of a territory, which do not ordinarily correspond to geographic maps or to political-administrative delimitations of the same territory. Obviously there is no radical opposition between mental maps and real spaces, since mental maps reflect the way in which a person occupy a space or move in it. Also the first oral narratives about Jesus were conditioned by the "mental maps" of their narrators and were closely bound to their places of dwelling and working (or to the places in which they had previously lived). Equally the written texts of the early Jesus' followers reflect the mental maps of their authors, their mental scenarios and specific aims. This is implicitly shown by their way of naming places or ignoring spatial determinations. We try to imagine how far the oral narratives and the writings of early Jesus' followers were influenced by the

6 We are not dealing therefore with the questions that are at the center of E. Stewart's book, *Gathered Around Jesus* (Stewart 2009). Stewart deals with the spatial presentation of Mark's Gospel (*ibidem*, 179–219). Our interest is concentrated on the localizations of groups of Jesus' followers and on the local origin of gospel information.

concrete experiences of localities where they lived while transmitting or writing stories about Jesus.⁷

We have to consider the references to places not only as narrative patterns, internal to the literary organization of the text. They are not an abstract rhetorical strategy. The indications of places may reveal a project of concrete affirmation and diffusion and may imply a purpose of territorial integration. Jesus and his followers after him were engaged in a religious diffusion over large territories. They attempted to spread their message in many directions. Information about their multiple locations is found in the pre-gospel narrations (transmitted by local groups) and preserved by the evangelists in their gospels.

The mechanism of attributing spaces to people and events applies in particular to written narratives. The narrators have in mind the spaces they consider as essential to the stories⁸ they are telling. Neither those who listen to or read an account are devoid of interest in the places where the events unfold. On the contrary, almost instinctively, a reader may even develop hypotheses concerning the places of the author and of characters and protagonists of his narration. In other words, the mention and attribution of places to events or persons may become part of the mental processes of both the narrator and the addressee. They are also strictly linked to concepts of space concerning their personal memory of the narrated event.

We can summarize. The reconstruction or description of an event involves a triangular pattern of interwoven elements.

a. On the one hand, the storytellers, authors or narrators clearly have in mind essential places of their accounts, even if they are unnamed or indicated only indirectly.

b. On the other hand, when listening to or reading a narrative, an individual develops ideas regarding its places, and is looking for answers concerning the location of the author, and of the recounted events and characters.

c. The place where the act of transmitting information about Jesus happens is a determining factor.⁹ Attention should focus on whether it is a known place,

7 Halbwachs 2008, 117–130; Merlau-Ponty 1962a, 1962b; Mendels 2004.

8 We distinguish particular places indicated by name (e.g. Capernaum) from an ecological scenario (mountains, lake, etc.) (see for example Table 3).

9 See e.g. Halbwachs 2008, 117–163. We are not affirming that a remembering process is reliable because of its relation to a place. Conversely, we are affirming that a narrator that finds him/herself in a particular place in which also Jesus was present can be induced to insert the name of that place in his/her narration. This fact helps us to locate the place in which information about Jesus was transmitted. See our critical examination of memory processes in Destro – Pesce 2014b, 49–69 (with bibliography). See also Schacter 1995; 2001; Ceci 1995; Kloppenborg 2012; Crook, 2012, 2013a; 2014.

already experienced in the past, or one that serves to prompt the recollection of forgotten references. In other terms, it should be borne in mind that when we recall an event from the past the place where we experience the act of remembering illuminates and transforms the event itself.

Remembering is linked to places in a variety of ways. The visit of a place in which we lived earlier is the occasion for recalling some of the encounters and experiences we had there. Sometimes a place can suddenly become a source of memories and information, or suggest similarities with other places we knew and that we no longer know.

Transmitting information is motivated or solicited by exterior events and experiences that are strictly connected to individual strategies and aims.

It is likely that some information about Jesus was bound to the places where Jesus' followers lived, and in which Jesus had been present on certain occasions (sometimes together with them). The past presence of Jesus in certain places was clearly an important support to the process of transmitting information about activities that he could have performed in those places.

A narrator that is present or lives or has lived in a certain place (e.g. a Galilean village) where Jesus was supposed to have performed some activities, can mention that place in his/her narrative about Jesus because s/he repeats a story narrated in that place, or because s/he thinks probable that Jesus performed that action in that place, since s/he received the information that Jesus performed a certain action and was sometimes present in that place. What is important in that case is that the presence of a narrator in a certain place induces him/her to locate Jesus' activity in it. We do not affirm the historicity of this location, but we want to underline the relation between a narrative and a place.

Understanding the connection of the act of narrating (or writing) with particular local areas is an operation that is potentially powerful. In the case of early groups of Jesus' followers it is extremely useful because it allows to define the identity, function, and continuity of agents and characters, as well as the narrator's reconstructive aim. It is a means of retaining and valorizing the complex texture interweaving vital components, rather than reducing them to abstract rationalizations.

In the oral narratives, in the written texts, and even in the ritual events of early Jesus' followers, the spatial participation attributed to individuals has an essential function. It may help to clarify the beliefs, the socio-cultural projects that were attributed to them, and the final effect they had in the early times after Jesus' death. The three data (place of narrators, place of listeners, and place of the act of transmitting information) introduce a second triangle.

2 Second Triangle: Places of Jesus' Activities, Places of Preachers and Narrators, Places of Writing

Up to now we have spoken of the place in which the act of remembering arises, of the local point of view of the narrator, and of that the addressee. In order to discuss properly Jesus' experiences, we now must introduce a new consideration on place usage. We look at three types of places.

a. *Places of Jesus' activities, where Jesus was present and/or operating.* For Jesus, the relationship with the Land of Israel and the Jewish people, whatever their location, was unavoidable. His itinerant activity characterizes his direct relationship with the territory of the Land of Israel, in which Jesus occupied different spaces and, in some cases, gave form to them.

b. *Places of residence of narrators, preachers, and those who spread Jesus' message.* First of all, it must be underlined that those who spoke of Jesus—*itinerant or not, writers or not*—had stable links with some places (places of origin or election). They possessed their own space, where they usually lived or gathered after their itinerant activities among rural villages.

We must then bear in mind *the link* between the local context of each story and the narrator's place of residence. In particular, Jesus' followers certainly had stable local contacts and dwelt in specific locations when they developed their narratives after Jesus' death. To a greater or lesser degree they depended on the cultural setting in which they lived. This led them to use specific spaces and distinctive ways to be in relation with them. In other words, they possessed criteria to understand their places. They had the tools to interpret the places of Jesus as well as their own places of residence (or where they passed through and eventually stopped).

In their earliest accounts, the authors were not simply remembering past events. They were also addressing and teaching people that they encountered in the present. Probably they were localizing, for their addressees, events in which they had participated with Jesus. Perhaps, they also spoke of what they themselves had experienced day-to-day in specific places. In short, they re-imagined and re-narrated the places of Jesus along with their own. Many of the latter could serve to define the former.

c. *Places of writing, where texts were produced.* Later, in a period successive to the earlier oral narrative, also the early writings of Jesus' followers, took into consideration spaces and localities, even if details are omitted. Their authors were fully aware that the events of Jesus' life occurred in specific places. They were conscious of their incontrovertible influential reality, even if they were not able to describe the environment where the events took place. In

their writings, Jesus' bonds with the real world were better defined through the mention of places even if their names were forgotten.

In this connection, we must note that oblivion is conceived by many scholars as part of memory strategy (Halbwachs 1925;¹⁰ Connerton 1989, 2009; Augé 2001). No one can retain everything. Nobody is in the condition of building an objective and exhaustive knowledge of the past. Forgetting many details of complex phenomena is the condition that permits to memorize the core of important events. Places of writing possess their specific identity as sites of production of memory, when they are institutionalized, for example as schools, or as ritual centers.

After Jesus' death, those who passed down the first accounts on Jesus sometimes established a link between his story and their places of dwelling, with the purpose of strengthening and ennobling the group to which they belonged. In this way, from the beginning, the origin of the various local groups might have been attributed to Jesus. However it is not deniable that groups of followers could originate in a particular place thanks to the activity and teaching of Jesus.¹¹

The connection of Jesus to 'known places' might have served to consolidate and legitimate a group as a depositary of important stories, or as exclusive addressee of Jesus' teachings that were unknown to others. In substance, some people, for the fact to possess information related to their own territory, could have been in the position to spread distinctive interpretations of Jesus' figure and message. The narrators' intent might have been to highlight a range of fundamental relationships with Jesus, (a) to prove the veracity of their stories through the bond with places where it was believed Jesus had been present; (b) to contest the images and stories about Jesus that originated from places other than those from which their informants came; (c) to exercise a function of legitimation or opposition *vis-a-vis* other Jewish groups who rejected Jesus' message.

Inevitably, and this is of special interest to us, spatial references can shed light on the question of the provenance of the information on Jesus that each gospel employed. It is therefore essential (a) to investigate how locations are indicated or omitted, where the narrator and the narrated subjects are situated. Obviously it is also important (b) to individuate the geographical/cultural

10 See Déloye – Haroche 2004, 30: following Halbwachs, "la mémoire et l'oubli sont également induits par le cadres sociaux".

11 The existence of sedentary followers of Jesus in the villages of the Land of Israel during his life is generally admitted. See e.g. Guijarro 2010, 120–126.

areas where the narrated events might really have taken place.¹² It is reasonably true that these two targets are not always coinciding.

For the authors of written works, it is more probable that the locations that they attribute to single words or acts of Jesus are something more than frames of the narration. The locations were destined to support or corroborate views of the authors of the gospels, to specify their different aims.

It is reasonable to think that, after Jesus' death, when writing, a follower intended to solicit readers and addressees to adhere to Jesus' message. In this respect we must recognize that writers could have a polemical stance towards other narrations. By giving indications of spaces, they quite naturally wished to legitimate their distinct position or vision. They for sure strengthened the politics of writing of their groups. We are convinced that within these perspectives a crucial or strategic role was played by the use of places in the texts, a role that no analysis can ignore.

3 Third Triangle: A Variety of Transmitting Groups

From the beginning, the information about Jesus was transmitted by numerous groups of followers, localized in different places.¹³ They preserved and independently transmitted what they knew. In order to build a map of the places of early followers, we need to distinguish three types of groups, which mark the dynamics of Jesus' movement in its aims and divergencies.

a. *Groups of sedentary followers, before Jesus' death.* Already during Jesus' lifetime, sedentary groups of followers very probably existed in different villages of the Land of Israel and neighboring areas visited by him. These groups sprang up on his encouragement. In all likelihood, such groups consisted of people who had adhered to Jesus' message, but had not followed him, preferring to carry out their activities in their villages. Their practical support (food and shelter) was in any case a substantial part of daily hospitality offered to itinerant members of Jesus' movement. What matters is that sedentary life of this people limited the influence of itinerancy.

In this connection an important consideration arises. We imagine that people in each village did not know Jesus' entire message and deeds, but only what he had said and done in that place. In all probability, village-based and sedentary followers had little knowledge of groups in other villages and regions of

12 See K.L. Schmidt 1919; Riesner 2011; Theissen 1989a; J.L. Reed 2000, 170–196; Lampe 2003; 2013; Trebilco 2013; 2011.

13 "Place" here primarily means a human settlement, an inhabited territory.

the Land of Israel (in Galilee, others in Judea, others in Samaria).¹⁴ Contacts among them were probably rare or difficult. We can suppose that the reciprocal knowledge among the groups located in these places, in the form of cultural and doctrinal exchanges, was inevitably limited or occasional. This means that the transmission about Jesus must have been rather variable and fragmented.

b. *Groups that survived Jesus' death.* There is the possibility that many groups, already existing during Jesus' lifetime, continued to exist in the same villages after his death. In subsequent decades, thanks to the zeal of itinerant preachers circulating in those areas, larger and more active groups may have developed there.

The presence of groups of ancient followers in villages visited by Jesus can be viewed as plausible. To identify the location of these villages is, however, an arduous task. In spite of such difficulty, spatial references contained in the gospels and other writings allow us to formulate hypotheses and reconstruct rough but significant maps.

c. *New groups founded by preachers.* It is plausible that, after Jesus' crucifixion, new groups of followers arose also in places not visited by Jesus and outside the Land of Israel, thanks to the efforts of persons who started spreading his message. These new groups should be clearly differentiated from the former: they probably consisted of people who had never met or heard Jesus.

It is also possible that some followers that had believed in Jesus during his life did not accept the new message spread after Jesus' death, and distanced themselves with some hostility from the new groups of followers. We also cannot exclude the existence of independent followers of Jesus. We have a symptom of that in Mark 9:38–40: one person who seems unknown to Jesus himself, accomplishes exorcisms in his name, independently from his disciples. According to Mark, Jesus seems to think possible that somebody autonomously and without his authorization may continue his activity. Also the contraposition between “those outside” and those to whom “the mystery of the kingdom” was revealed (Mark 4:11) could suppose the existence of independent followers of Jesus. Following Acts 19:1–7 there were in Ephesus, before Paul, Jesus' believers that followed independent teachings and ritual practices.

4 Indications of Places within the Gospels

The typology, based on the canonical gospels, which we are going to present, is a simplification of a very wide and variegated activity of writing. We are

14 On Galilean villages see Edwards 2007; Aviam 2004b; Zwickel 2013.

aware of the complexity of problems we are trying to face. The scheme we have drawn constitutes only a first step towards more detailed and documented elaborations.¹⁵ Our main hypothesis is that the gospels permit, in several cases, to reconstruct the places of *provenance* of information about Jesus. We want to stress that we are not speaking about the places of redaction of the gospels, but about the place of origin of their sources.

In our analysis, we are concerned with dissimilarities, contradictions and omissions in the spatial references of the gospels that could allow a reconstruction of various groups of Jesus' followers, their independent information and their reciprocal distance.

In other words, our basic analysis moves from the fact that: (a) each of the early groups of followers, located in different places of the Land of Israel (and of the Mediterranean world), had only partial knowledge of Jesus activity and message; (b) these differently localized groups were at the origin of many lines of transmission about Jesus that grew independently, without reciprocal contact or knowledge;¹⁶ (c) sometimes, when these different lines of transmission (developed by the local groups and/or by the itinerant preachers) came into contact, conflicts and divergent interpretations arose.

The information of the gospels about the place of origin of the post-Jesus movement is surprisingly divergent. Mark and Matthew imagine that the first expansion of Jesus' message after his death began in Galilee. Conversely, Luke-Acts and Chapter 20 of John imagine a beginning from Jerusalem. The gospel of Mark tells us that Jesus, going toward the Mount of Olives after the Last Supper, said to his disciples:

after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee (Mark 14:28).

15 In this context see Guijarro's observation about Destro – Pesce 2014: "Las aportaciones de este libro al estudio sobre el proceso de transmisión de los recuerdos sobre Jesús son muy notables. La más importante de todas ellas es, a mi modo de ver, el hecho de insistir en la importancia del "lugar" como categoría antropológica que determina a las personas y lo que hacen. Los recuerdos sobre Jesús no se transmitieron de forma uniforme y homogénea en todos los lugares, sino que "el lugar" como espacio físico, social y cultural determinó en gran medida esta transmisión, dando lugar a flujos muy variados por los que circularon los recuerdos sobre Jesús. [...] Los autores proponen distinguir entre el lugar en que se localiza un acontecimiento, el lugar del relato y el lugar de la escritura. La distinción es muy iluminadora a la hora de determinar el proceso seguido por un recuerdo" (Guijarro 2015).

16 On the transmission of the words of Jesus see Pesce and Rescio 2011; Walt 2013 (on the words of Jesus in Paul); Tripaldi 2010 (on the words of Jesus in the Revelation).

Mark insists on this statement. When Mary Magdalene, Mary, mother of James, and Salome do not find the body of Jesus in the tomb, a youth (perhaps an angel) says to them:

Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you (Mark 16:6–7).

Probably, Mark believed that, after Jesus' death, his disciples returned to Galilee, which was their base, met the risen Jesus, continued to be present there, and from there (Galilee) started their activities of spreading Jesus' message.

The Gospel of Matthew confirms this story and, indeed, articulates it further by describing the meeting of Jesus with his disciples in Galilee. Matthew repeats the prediction of Jesus to his disciples after the Last Supper:

But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee (Matthew 26:32).

Then, as in Mark, the angel tells the women that Jesus will precede the disciples to Galilee:

go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him' (Matthew 28:7)

Matthew, however, adds an episode in which Jesus himself repeats to the women that he will meet his disciples only in Galilee:

Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me' (Matthew 28:10).

Finally, Matthew adds the scene (omitted in Mark) of the meeting of Jesus and his disciples in Galilee:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matthew 28:19–20).

Matthew insists four times (against twice in Mark) on the meeting in Galilee after Jesus' death. It seems highly probable that Matthew was familiar with the Gospel of Mark: whatever the case, he added two scenes that are not found in Mark. He must therefore have had information that was independent of Mark. In brief, according to the stories used by Mark and Matthew, after Jesus' death, the disciples did not stay in Jerusalem, but returned to their own land of Galilee. There—and not in Jerusalem—they witnessed the appearance of Jesus, risen from the dead. Within this scenario, the preaching to all nations seemingly started from Galilee, not from Jerusalem.

The stories of Mark and Matthew imagine a significant Galilean localization of the groups of Jesus' disciples after his death. It is therefore most likely that some followers were present in the same Galilean places, before and after Jesus' death, and that they had common information about him in those places.¹⁷ Mark and Matthew do not tell us explicitly where in Galilee the groups of followers were located. However, if we look carefully at the locations of Jesus' activity in Mark and Matthew—as we attempt to do further on—we can arrive at some hypotheses.

Luke and the Acts of the Apostles present a very different setting. After leaving the place of the Last Supper, Jesus does not say, as in Mark 14:28: "after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee." Luke completely omits this prediction of Jesus. Secondly, this Gospel corrects the story of the women who discover Jesus' empty tomb, in asserting that the two men/angels do not order the women to tell the disciples to go to Galilee to meet Jesus:

While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words (Luke 24:4–8).

Luke seems to know Mark's idea that Jesus would appear in Galilee. This may mean that such idea was widespread. He therefore builds an account in which the angels speak of Galilee, but in quite different terms. The two angels say

17 Also Norelli 2014, 30–31 argues for a continuity of presence of Jesus' followers in Galilee before and after Jesus death. See Kee 1992; Baumgarten 1992; Cappelletti 2007.

that Jesus—when still in Galilee—had predicted his own death and resurrection. In other words, Luke seems to suggest that Mark was relying on unreliable information about what the angels had said. They were talking about Galilee, yes, but in a significantly contrasting sense.

The appearance of Jesus that Luke relates first concerns two disciples on the road to Emmaus (24:13–33), “a village sixty miles from Jerusalem”. When the apparition is over, the two followers decide to return to Jerusalem. It is in Jerusalem that crucial subsequent events take place. According to Luke, this town is the location of two successive apparitions of Jesus, the first of which is “to Simon” (Luke 24:34). In his second apparition, Jesus orders the disciples to “stay” in Jerusalem:

so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high (24:49).

Jesus then leads his disciples out of Jerusalem to Bethany, and ascends into heaven.¹⁸ After this, the disciples once again return to Jerusalem:

And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God (24:52–53).

In Luke’s view, Jesus’ message is localized, from the very outset, in this city:

Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem (24:46–47).¹⁹

The beginning in Jerusalem of the announcement of “repentance and forgiveness” is for Luke also predicted by the Holy Scriptures. Again, in the Acts of the Apostles, Luke emphasizes the preceding statements. The apparitions of the risen Jesus take place in Jerusalem and are accompanied by the command to remain in the city:

¹⁸ “And was carried up into heaven” (Luke 24,51) is not present in all manuscripts.

¹⁹ Luke already in the third prevision of Jesus death (Luke 18:31–34) added to Mark that “everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished” (Luke 18:31). Now he adds that the Jewish scriptures also refer to the fact that “repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations” and that the proclamation will begin from Jerusalem.

appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3);

he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now (Acts 1:4–5);

The disciples come back to Jerusalem after Jesus' ascension, which takes place outside the city:

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away (Acts 1:12).

The dissemination of Jesus' message must without doubt start from Jerusalem:

you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Perhaps, the absence in this sentence of any mention of Galilee can be explained by the fact that it is sometimes considered as part of Judea. In any case, the diffusion of Jesus' message in Galilee does not seem of importance to the author of Acts.

It is highly revealing that Acts 8:1 states that the disciples who fled from Jerusalem because of "persecution" (*diôgmos*), spread out into Judea and Samaria, not into Galilee:

all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria (8:1).

In Chapter 9, however, the author of the Acts shows that he knows that "the church" existed also in Galilee:

Meanwhile the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up (9:31).²⁰

20 "The mission to Judea and Samaria has been narrated" by Luke (Acts 8:1–40), but Luke never speaks of the evangelization of the Galilee, and in fact this is his only formal acknowledgment of the existence of the Church there" (L.T. Johnson 1992, 176).

The author of the Acts does not write of the diffusion of the message about Jesus in Galilee after his resurrection, but is forced to admit that groups of Jesus' followers existed there. It is an element that his theological intent has not managed to cancel out.

The Acts relate that Peter, from Jerusalem, went to Lydda, where Jesus groups already existed:

he came down also to the saints living in Lydda (9:32).

From Lydda, Peter then went to Jaffa (9:38–42) and, finally, to Caesarea (10:24). Once again, no mention is made of Galilee. However, it is interesting that both in Lydda and Jaffa there already existed disciples of Jesus, and Peter went to visit them. Thus, the Acts presume the existence of Jesus groups in Judea that had not been founded by the disciples who had left Jerusalem. This image seems to be similar to that of Paul, who presupposes the presence of “churches” in Judea as early as the Thirties (Gal 1:22–14; 1 Thess 2:14).

In Luke, the silence regarding the situation of Jesus' followers in Galilee may be explained in terms of localization. Probably, Luke's sources, as we will see, came from areas outside of Galilee, in particular, from Jerusalem, Bethany, and some villages of Judea and Samaria. This delineates a landscape with Jerusalem at its center, then the Mediterranean coast of Judea (Jaffa and Caesarea) with its hinterland (Lydda, and the area of Sharon) and Samaria.²¹

The two conflicting versions about the origin of the post-Jesus movement that emerge from Mark/Matthew, on the one hand, and from Luke/Acts (and John 20), on the other, may suggest the existence of at least two main groups of followers, one in Galilee and another in Judea, which developed rather or totally independently. They sought legitimation through a mandate of the resurrected Jesus.

The narratives of two different origins of the post-Jesus movement seem to point to a conflict between two groups or a constellation of groups located in different geographical areas, each of which had its own history of the beginnings. This is a fact of extraordinary importance, since it testifies to irreconcilable versions of the first spreading of Jesus' message after his death. According to Mark and Matthew, groups of followers existed in Galilee, before his death, which—after the crucifixion—carried forth his message, starting from there. According to Luke, by contrast, the leading nucleus of disciples who had been

21 It is perhaps interesting that in the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones* (1v–x) Peter travels from Cesarea to Antioch along the Mediterranean coast, and therefore without entering the Galilee.

with Jesus in Galilee, did not move from Jerusalem, and began to disseminate his message above all in Judea and Samaria, and then elsewhere (but not in Galilee). The physical difference between the groups casts light on the local realities, on their heterogeneity and distance. The texts build upon these divergent grounds.²²

The narratives about two different places of origins of the post-Jesus movement seem to mark a critical moment of divarication, and must be viewed from a specific perspective. In the two conflicting accounts, the definition of the final place of Jesus' presence is essential. The place where Jesus was, in the final moment before his disappearance, is the *entry point* for determining the direction in which the post-Jesus movement must and will move. It indicates that there is a *threshold*. The insistence on the localization of this

22 Already E. Lohmeyer in 1936 wrote that Mark implied a conflict between two groups of Jesus' movement situated in two different part of the Land of Israel: Jerusalem and Galilee (Lohmeyer 1936, 26–35). See also Lightfoot 1937; D.N. Peterson 2000, 11; different opinions in Freyne 2001.2006, 171–174. Lohmeyer, in his commentary on Mark, wrote (against J. Weiss) that the disciples of Jesus had to go back to Galilee not in order to see the resurrected Jesus, but to wait for his parousia (1967, 355–357). Galilee, place of origin of Jesus' mission was also place of his fulfillment. We do not share this phantasy. Yarbrow Collins (2007, 658–667) criticizes Lohmeyer's connection between return to Galilee and expectation of the parousia. She admits that “from a historical point of view, resurrection appearances did take place in Galilee” (ivi, 667). She however continues to think that “soon after the resurrection-appearances, the disciples moved to Jerusalem” (*ibidem*). The reason for affirming a return to Jerusalem, following Yarbrow Collins, is “the lack of attestation for an important community in Galilee in the early period and the association of Peter and of the prominent disciples with Jerusalem” (*ibidem*). The disciples would have return to Jerusalem because they were waiting there the parousia or perhaps because Jerusalem seemed to them as “an appropriate starting point and center of their missionary activities” (*ibidem*). The *petitio principii* implied in this argument is also present in C. Burkitt who did not believe possible that the appearances “could [...] have taken place in Galilee, because, if they had, Galilee would have been the center of the earliest community of the followers of Jesus, rather than Jerusalem. That Jerusalem was in fact its center is attested by Acts and the Letters of Paul” (ivi, 659). However, the contrast between Mark/Matthew and Luke/Acts obliges to put in question the presupposition that the vision of the Acts constitutes the basis for a reconstruction of the history of the first Jesus groups. Paul's evidence of a presence of Jesus' groups in Arabia, Syria, and Judea can be read not only in the light of the picture of the Acts. The idea of the existence of only one center and only one beginning of the post-Jesus movement must be questioned. The presence in Jerusalem of Peter and the others Galilean disciples can be explained by their more or less occasional visits to Jerusalem, for example in occasion of pilgrimages.

threshold becomes a crucial element in the struggle of groups engaged in their identity construction.²³

Chapter 21 of John seems to express an agreement between a part of the Johannine groups and the groups of Galilean followers at the end of the first century. The last appearance of the resurrected Jesus takes place (also for John 21) in Galilee. On this occasion, Jesus gives a role of leadership to Simon Peter (as in Matthew) and not to the beloved disciple. In substance, at least a part of the Johannine groups seem to recognize that the post-Jesus movement began in Galilee and accept the leadership of Peter defended by many Galilean post-Jesus' followers (Matthew 16:18).

5 The Places of the Narrative in Mark

The author of Mark seems to have very limited knowledge as to the exact location of the events of Jesus' life. He seems to have great difficulty in locating Jesus' activity when his sources did not contain indications of places. In many cases, the author of Mark gives no local attestation for the words and acts of Jesus (see, for example, the section from Mark 12:8 to 14:34). Out of 62 literary units from the Baptism to the entrance into Jerusalem, 35 provide no indications of place. It is particularly remarkable that Luke and Matthew do not introduce such space details in the same 35 cases. This seemingly means that also Luke and Matthew had no knowledge of the exact sites in which these activities took place.

It is worth noting that the author of Mark sometimes indicates the names of villages and places, and in some cases also affirms that particular activities of Jesus were performed in those places. (a) In Mark the localities in which Jesus performs specific activities are six: Nazareth (1:9; 6:1–6²⁴); Capernaum (1:21; 2:1; 9:33); Bethsaida²⁵ (6:45; 8:22); Jericho (10:46); Bethany (11:1.11; 14:3); Jerusalem. (b) In Mark local names are also given without reference to any specific activity of Jesus: Tyre,²⁶ Sidon (7:31), Bethphage (11:1), Gennesaret (6:53).²⁷ (c) In

23 If the representation of space is a threshold "between description and prescription, between language and power", it follows that these groups may be confronting different strategies of territorial expansion (Ponzi and Gentili 2012, 59). See also *ivi*, 7–149.

24 Nazareth is not explicitly mentioned in Mark 6:1–6.

25 H.-W. Kuhn, 2011; Arav and R.A. Freund, 2004; Strickert 2010; Savage 2007.2011.

26 7:24, only some manuscripts add "and Sidon".

27 Gennesaret seems to be not primary a village but a zone of the coast between Tiberias and Capernaum, see Edwards 1992.

other cases, in Mark large areas are mentioned in which the activities of Jesus took place, without indicating any specific place. The texts indicates Galilee in general, Judea²⁸ in general; the country of the Gerasenes (5:1); Idumaea, and the region of Jordan; “the regions around Tyre and Sidon” (3:8: *ta peri Tyron kai Sidōna*)” or “the region of Tyre” (*ta oria Tyrou*, 7:24.31); “the regions of the Decapolis” (*ta oria Dekapoleōs*: 7:31); “the parts of Dalmanutha” (*ta merē Dalmanutha*, 8:10).

The generic mention of large areas seems to imply that Mark was based on sources informing about Jesus' activity in those regions, without, however, an exact knowledge of single places where Jesus was active (see Table 1)

TABLE 1

Mark's indications of place in the 62 literary units from the Baptism to the entrance in Jerusalem^a

1. 1:1–8 the whole Judean countryside, Jerusalem, Jordan
2. 1:9–15 Nazareth, Jordan
3. 1:16–20 Sea of Galilee
4. 1:21–28 Capernaum
5. 1:29–31 Capernaum (synagogue)
6. 1:32–34 Capernaum
7. 1:35–39 Villages near Capernaum, Galilee
8. 1:40–45 no place indication (also in Matthew 8:2–4 no place indication; Luke 5:12 “in one of the cities”)
9. 2:1–12 Capernaum
10. 2:13: Sea of Galilee
11. 2:14–17 no place indication (also in Matthew 9:9–13 and Luke 5:27–32 no place indication)
- In the 14 units (from nr.12 to 25) contained in 2:18–4:34 no place indications (also in Matthew and Luke no place indications)
26. 4:35–41 the other side of the Sea of Galilee
27. 5:1–20 the country of the Gerasenes, the Decapolis

28 It is well known that Judea can have different meaning to Romans, to different kinds of Jews of the Land of Israel. Specific meanings are to be recognized in Josephus, Philo and in each gospel.

TABLE 1 (cont.)

Mark's indications of place in the 62 literary units from the Baptism to the entrance in Jerusalem^a

- 28. 5:21 the other side of the Sea of Galilee
 - 29. 5:22–43 no place indication (also Matthew 9:18–26 and Luke 8:40–56 no place indication)
 - 30. 6:1–6 Nazareth (his hometown)
 - 31. 32. 33. 34. 35 (6:6b–44) no place indication (also Matthew 9:35–13:35; 14:1–21 and Luke 9:1–10 no place indication; Luke 9:10b–17 a city called Bethsaida)
 - 36. 6:45–52 Bethsaida
 - 37. 6:53–56 Gennesaret and related region
 - 38. 7:1–22 no place indication (also Matthew 15:1–20 no place indication)
 - 39. 7:24–30 the region of Tyre and of Sidon
 - 40. 7:31–37 Tyre, Sidon, Sea of Galilee, the region of the Decapolis
 - 41. 8:1–9 no place indication (also Matthew 15:32–39 no place indication)
 - 42. 8:10–13 Dalmanutha, the other side of the Sea of Galilee
 - 43. 8:14–21 no place indication (also Matthew 16:5–12 and Luke 12:1–10 no place indication)
 - 44. 8:22–26 Bethsaida
 - 45. 8:27–33 villages near Caesarea Philippi
 - 46.47.48. 8:34–9:29 no place indication (also Matthew 16:21–17:20 and Luke 9:23–43a no place indication)
 - 49. 9:30–32 passing through Galilee
 - 50. 9:3–37 Capernaum
 - 51. 52. 9:38–50 no place indication (also Matthew 10:42; 18:6–9 and Luke 9:49–50; 17:1–2; 14:34–35 no place indication)
 - 53. 10:1: Judea and beyond the Jordan
 - 54. 55.56. 10:2–31 no place indication (also Matthew 19:3–30 and Luke 18:15–30 no place indication)
 - 57.10:32a going up to Jerusalem
 - 58. 59. 60 10:32b–45 no place indication (also Matthew 20:17b–28 and Luke 18:31–34 no place indication)
 - 61. 10:46–52 Jericho
 - 62. 11:1–16 approaching Jerusalem; Bethphage, Bethany, Mount of Olives
-

a Table 1 lists the presence or absence of indications of places in Mark's literary units from the baptism until the entrance in Jerusalem. It is to note that to the absence of indication of place in Mark corresponds also an absence of indication of place in Matthew and Luke.

6 The Mental Map of Mark

It is important to obtain a picture of Mark's mental map of spaces,²⁹ which constitutes the background of his narrative. A passage that sums up the areas from which crowds arrived to see Jesus, is highly significant:

Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon (3:7–8).

This report is undoubtedly redactional and reflects the narrative imagination of Mark, the mental map into which Jesus' activity is projected. Mark seems to envisage a scenario in which crowds were moving from south (Idumea) to north; from the river (*pera tou Iordanou*) westward; from the northern coastal area (Tyre, Sidon) towards the southeast. For Mark, Jesus is therefore at the center of these three trajectories, that is to say, in northern Galilee. Perhaps, the lake is the main reference point, at the center of its author mental map. That the area of the lake predominates in his story is shown by the terminology adopted by the author. Mark employs the term "sea" 19 times, against Matthew's 16 times (1.26 per thousand against Matthew's 0.67 per thousand). Luke mentions it only 3 times, John 9. In John, however, references to the lake appear only in chapters 6 and 21, i.e. in the most synoptic scenes. The total absence of the sea from the remainder of John's story indicates that the mental map of its author, along with those of his sources, contemplate places completely extraneous to the Lake of Galilee. The term "boat" appears 18 times in Mark, against Matthew's 13, Luke's 8 and John's 9, although again only in chapters 6 and 21.

Essentially, if we exclude the references to Jerusalem (and to the close-by villages of Bethany, Bethphage) and to Jericho, Mark almost exclusively mentions localities and regions in the north of the Land of Israel. This means that its map of localities is chiefly built on information that came from sources and informers of those areas.

Our argument is based on the hypothesis that the localizations present in the gospels were *already* present in the pre-gospel stories. The local indications

29 The expression "mental map of Mark" delineates Mark's imagination of Jesus' occupation and utilization of spaces in everyday life (all his movements and strategy of dislocation in the territory, preference for certain roads, landscapes, villages, non-urban spaces, households). See Gould and White 1986; see also Havrelock, 2007.

were preserved in the gospel accounts presumably *because* the pre-gospels narrators came from those places.

7 Tentative Systemic Analysis of the Places of Jesus in Mark

1. Various hypotheses may be formulated to explain why from time to time Mark referred to some places. We may think that (a) Mark perhaps knew that in a certain place existed a group of Jesus' followers, and this led him to think that Jesus had been present in that place. (b) Perhaps, the reference is to be attributed to a theological conviction of Mark. (c) Or again, the reference to a place had already been reported in the source used by Mark. (d) Finally, Mark might have adopted a place name (sometimes originating from the previous transmission) because it was well known among his readers, and useful for a plausible scenario of Jesus' movements.

Our exegetical hypothesis is that Mark's indications are not redactional but were already present in the pre-Markan sources. What is redactional in Mark is not the mention of place but the succession of movements and dislocations of Jesus inside or outside the Land of Israel.

A question arises: why are certain places remembered in some pre-Markan sources (and others forgotten)? Our hypothesis is that groups of followers existed in the villages and places named in the pre-Markan sources. That would explain why information about Jesus was transmitted in these villages. This may mean that in the pre-Markan narratives, the names of places had the function of legitimizing the groups of followers in the place in which they lived, *vis-a-vis* other groups located elsewhere.

In the pre-gospel transmission only single episodes or little blocks of narratives—concerning specific topics—were presumably passed on. An overall complete narration of the activity of Jesus appears absent. Seemingly, there was no need to locate Jesus' activity in a sequence of times and places. The context in which the pre-Markan materials seem to be transmitted was sometimes that of the informal communication among people. In case of ritual and preaching activities (announcements, teachings, baptisms, feasts, convivial meetings) the mention of specific locations was not essential.

Overall, the history of the text's redaction leads us to believe that Mark, to give a spatial scenario to Jesus' activity, limited himself to using place references that were already known in the circles of Jesus' followers on which he depended. He probably inserted them into a sequence of journeys and displacements of Jesus through the territory. It is in this succession of displacements that Mark's creative narration must be analyzed, rather than in spatial

references connected to individual episodes. The central function of itinerancy in Mark's narrative structure is well known.³⁰ Names of places, in Mark, have often the function of marking points of departure, transit or arrival of Jesus. The episodes in and around Capernaum (1:21–39; 2:1) are of special importance, in this sense. One has the impression that the house mentioned in Mark 3:20 is imagined to be in Capernaum, not far, perhaps, from the house in which Jesus' mother and siblings lived. In 9:33, after a long journey, Jesus returns to Capernaum and “when he was in the house” questioned the disciples (as if he had a house there). By attributing to Jesus a dwelling in Capernaum, the text suggests a certain distance of Jesus from the itinerant life, and this has an effect on the story as a whole. The author localizes Jesus at Capernaum several times because it is certain that Jesus was active there. As we have said, our thesis is that Mark uses the reference to place to provide a plausible geographical and narrative structure to Jesus' mobility. Capernaum, a place left or reached many times by Jesus, is for Mark a narrative ingredient that gives strength and structure to Jesus' story.

Thus, the spatial environment in which Mark's author mentally imagines Jesus' story is that of a semi-itinerancy, with a base in a house in proximity to the lake. It is worth recalling that Mark insistently refers to Jesus' esoteric teaching inside houses. In six cases (3:20–35; 7:17; 7:24; 9:28; 9:33; 10:10), Mark's text locates Jesus' esoteric teachings inside a house, while Luke and Matthew do not locate them inside the walls of a home.

Another locality in Mark seems to have an important function: the northern area of the lake of Galilee. Mark affirms that Jesus is active in the coastal areas of the lake (1:16–20; 2:13; 3:7; 4:1; 5:13; 5:21; 7:31) and states seven times that Jesus crossed the lake by boat from one shore to the other (4:35; 5:21; 6:32; 6:45; 6:53; 8:10; 8:13). Again, he uses the information he has received in order to construct a solid narrative of Jesus' movement rooted within the territory.

If the names of places were already present in the sources and information that Mark disposed of, we have to pose the question of the historical reliability of such information in the oral transmission. It is obvious that Jesus performed certain actions and visited particular places (e.g. Capernaum). However, the attribution of certain deeds or words of Jesus to a particular place may have

30 Studies on the importance of Jesus' dislocations in Mark are not lacking (see Manicardi 1981, 11–46; Stewart 2009). Since Mark attributes particular importance to Jesus' dislocations, it is obvious that his narrative mentions names of places. Without mentioning specific places to which Jesus moved, the narration of his travels would be not intelligible. We ask however if the indications of place in Mark could be the symptom of the existence of groups of Jesus' followers in the areas indicated by this Gospel.

occurred only at a certain moment of the transmission about Jesus' activity. Essentially, the belief that Jesus had been present in a given place, coupled with the belief that he said certain things and performed certain actions, could have encouraged narrators to link known episodes with known places, even when, in reality, this link may not have existed.

8 Hypothesis on Pre-Markan Situations

We must ask ourselves why the transmission of information on Jesus, previous to Mark, preserved the memory of certain places rather than others (the majority), which had been forgotten. Our hypothesis is that the places remembered were home to early Jesus groups, which had therefore transmitted information of events that happened there. The indications of places by the author of Mark are not his invention, but existed in the information that was transmitted previous to him. They probably originated from restricted circles. However, we cannot know when these indications and the groups who transmitted them formed in such places.

In the pre-gospel oral accounts, localization plausibly served the primary function of giving roots and legitimation to local groups (as opposed to other groups located elsewhere, or to local Jewish population who did not follow Jesus). As we said, the pre-evangelical stories were in fact passed down in single units or blocks. They however lacked any intention to embrace the complete history of Jesus. Absent, perhaps, was also the need to situate Jesus' actions in a predisposed geographical arranged sequence of places. Conversely, in a gospel, the context of Jesus' deeds and words is given by its narrative structure and by its literary and theological purposes.

In conclusion, the names of places indicated by Mark seem to refer to three main geographical territories. The most important is composed of relatively contiguous areas. (a) Northern Galilee, the lake and adjacent territories (east, west, and north of the lake) are of central importance. In this spatial scenario, we noted that reference is made to: Gennesaret, Capernaum, Bethsaida, the territory of the Gerasenes and the western, eastern and northern shores of the lake) and to the southern parts of Philip's tetrarchy and the southern and western areas of the Decapolis. The information about Jesus' localizations seems to come from a relatively limited territory and seems to presuppose local transmitters. This is particularly true for the area of Gennesaret, Capernaum, Bethsaida and Gerasa. (b) A second area is the Golan and the territories of Western Syria i.e. areas north and northwest of Galilee (Caesarea Philippi, Tyre and Sidon). It is plausible that groups of Jesus' followers existed in these places. Probably, it was also the area of provenance of information about itinerant

prophets found in the Ascension of Isaiah (AI 1–5). These groups seem to present different characteristics from those of Capernaum or the regions west of Lake of Galilee. (c) The third region is lower Galilee where the only reference is Nazareth. Mark's narration of Jesus' failure in Nazareth could be the expression of a polemic against some groups of followers (and/or Jesus' family) situated in that part of Galilee (which is perhaps present also in Mark 4:10–11).

S. Guijarro posits the existence of a popular transmission on Jesus in Galilee against which, first Q and then Mark, polemicized. According to him, different types of first-generation followers were present in Galilee: first of all "the groups that formed around the house or itinerant disciples" and, also, "a popular tradition of a more local character" (Guijarro 2010, 121). Evidence of the former is derived from several pre-Markan controversies (Mark 2:13–28 and, above all, Q, which is—for Guijarro—located in Galilee). The second type of followers, whom Guijarro calls "the Galilean followers of Jesus" (2010, 124), against which the polemics of Q is oriented, considered Jesus as a prophet, like Elijah (2010, 125). Finally, Guijarro mentions "another group of Galilean disciples linked to Jesus' places of origin and to his lineage", on whom we obtain information from Julius Africanus' Letter to Aristides.

In our opinion, the phrases of 4:10–11 also presuppose the existence of Jesus' followers in Galilee, against whom Mark polemicizes. He counterpoises the followers who surround Jesus together with the Twelve with "those from outside", who do not have a correct understanding of Jesus' message.

To draw an overall picture of the data that emerge from Mark alone, we may therefore hypothesize a variety of settlements of Jesus' followers (see Figure 1: Places of origin of sources of the Gospels). The disparity of places leads us to appreciate how varied and patchy the presence of Jesus' followers was in the central region of Galilee, in Philip's tetrarchy, or in the southwestern part of the Decapolis. It is not difficult to imagine groups at Capernaum, Bethsaida, the lakeshores of the Decapolis, and in the area of Gennesaret (for example, Magdala). Groups of Jesus' followers (perhaps Jewish, perhaps also non-Jewish) seem to have existed at Tyre and even Sidon, and at Caesarea Philippi.

9 Localities in Q

About Q's indications of place, Jonathan L. Reed presents the following hypothesis:

The nine different places named in Q form a set of three concentric circles converging on Capernaum (Q 10:15). Within a short radius from

Capernaum are Chorazin and Bethsaida (Q 10:13). The second of the concentric circles is formed by the twin cities of Tyre and Sidon to the North (Q 10:13–14) and Jerusalem to the South (Q 13:34). The final concentric circle forms the mythical boundaries of the Q community's social map made up of the epic cities of Sodom to the extreme south (Q 10:12) and Nineveh to the extreme north (Q 11:32).³¹

William Arnal (2001, 172), re-working an idea of John Kloppenborg, thinks that the Q scribes were not itinerant. This coincides with Mark's view of Jesus' activity, as being based on a house, sometimes in Capernaum, sometimes elsewhere). Arnal suggests that Capernaum had a sufficient density of bureaucrats to sustain the kind of scribal activity requested to produce the hypothetical document Q.³²

In reality the places named in Q in which Jesus is really acting are the places of John's baptism and the place of temptations (the Jordan and Jerusalem); Capernaum (Q 7:1) in the case of the Centurion; perhaps Nazareth (Q 4:16). The majority of place names are concentrated in Q 10:13–14 where Chorazin, Bethsaida (and Capernaum) are opposed to Tyre and Sidon.

Q 13:34 seems to suppose that Jesus was in Jerusalem many times. Hence, rather than a concentric representation with a center in Capernaum, there were probably two main areas: Jerusalem and the place of John's baptism, on the one hand, and Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Capernaum, on the other.³³

10 Luke Corrects Mark

In many cases, the Gospel of Luke reveals a tendency to correct the Galilean locations of Jesus present in Mark. Luke corrects Mark in numerous ways, omitting the mention of Galilean places or giving place-indications different from those in Mark.

1. In 1:9 Mark writes that "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan". Luke makes absolutely no reference to Jesus having come from Galilee: "Now when all the people were baptized, and

31 J.L. Reed, "The Sayings Source Q in Galilee", in Id., *Archeology and the Galilean Jesus, A Re-examination of the Evidence*, Harrisburg, Trinity Press International, 2000, pp. 170–196), here p. 183. See the observations of J.S. Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q. The History and Setting of the Sayings gospel*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2000, pp. 172–175.

32 See also Asgeirsson 2005, 110.

33 In Q 7:9 Israel means the people of Israel in the Land of Israel.

when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened", thus omitting to say where the scene took place (Luke 3:21).

2. In Mark 1:21 we read "they went to Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue". Luke feels the need to explain to his addressees that Capernaum is "a city in Galilee" (Luke 4:31), as if they knew little or nothing of Galilee.³⁴

3. In Luke 9:43b the localization emphasized by Mark 9:30 is omitted ("they went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it")

4. Again, in 9:46, narrating the dispute among the disciples "as to which one of them was the greatest", Luke removes the localization in a house at Capernaum (in contrast with Mark 9:33) (see Bovon 1991, 504).

5. Luke leaves out the healing of the blind man of Bethsaida, a further Galilean localization of Mark (8:22–26). It is true, however, that the same omission occurs also in Matthew.

6. Luke (9:18–21) does not indicate the location of Peter's declaration on the messianicity of Jesus, which Mark situates in Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:27). He limits himself to saying that Jesus was to one side (*kata monas*): "Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him . . ." (Luke 9:18).

7. The journey to Tyre, Sidon and the Decapolis is not present in Luke, who thus reveals himself to be foreign to these regions. If Luke were unfamiliar with the Gospel of Mark, this omission would be explained by the fact that his informers and sources did not possess information on those places. If Luke, instead, did know the Gospel of Mark in its present form, we believe that he omitted the journey because he saw it as unreliable.³⁵

8. Luke is also in strong discordance with Mark, when in 14:3–9 he speaks of the anointing of Jesus during a supper at Bethany in the house of Simon the Leper. Luke sets this scene in an uncertain place (probably in Galilee) and the woman was, according to Luke, a "sinner" (Luke 7:36–50). It means, therefore, that Luke knew the episode in a different form from the one given by Mark, and that the former was unaware of the place in which it occurred.

34 Bovon 1991, 212: "les lecteurs ignorent peut-être que Capharnaüm est en Galilée".

35 "On ne sait pas exactement pourquoi" writes Bovon 1991, 465. Bovon believes that "il [...] est peu vraisemblable qu'il ait voulu renoncer au voyage du Messie à l'étranger (Tyre et Sidon, Mc 7, 24.31), alors qu'auparavant il n'a pas hésité à envoyer Jésus dans la Décapole (Luke 8: 26–39)" (*ivi.*, 466). Jesus's trip could have been added to Mark's Gospel in a redaction successive to that known by Luke. In any case or Luke ignores information about Jesus trip in these places or judges them not reliable. That means that he had no special sources about Jesus' activity in those places.

The correction prompts us to think that Luke might not have trusted Mark's localizations.

9. Luke also omits the reference to Gennesaret (on the western shore of the Lake of Galilee), where the boat carrying Jesus and his disciples, according to Mark, arrived after Jesus reached them by walking on the water (Mark 6:45–52).

10. Likewise, Luke omits the reference to Dalmanutha (Mark 8:10) because he also leaves out the story of the multiplication of the food for 4000 people (Mark 8:1–10).

11. Luke omits five of the seven crossings of the lake mentioned in Mark (while Matthew omits only one of them). This proves the importance of the lake (and its crossings) in the mental map of Mark's author and how little it counted, instead, in that of Luke.³⁶

Particularly relevant is the confrontation between Mark 3:7–8 and Luke 6:17. Mark 3:7–8 states:

Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon.

Mark indicates six regions from which people flowed towards the lake of Galilee to meet Jesus. Luke omits Galilee, Idumea and the region of Jordan:

He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon.

Perhaps, the omission of Galilee could be explained by the fact that it was included in the mention of "all Judea". The omission of "Idumea" and "beyond the Jordan" (*peran tou Iordanou*) indicates that the eastern territories of the Land of Israel were not of particular interest for Luke. The location on which he focuses is Judea and the western part of the Land of Israel. This is confirmed by a second fact. Mark writes that people came from "the region around Tyre and Sidon". Luke writes that people came from the Mediterranean coast (*paralios*) of the two cities. The physical context he has in mind is the sea coast of Syria.

36 The expression "getting into (*embainô*) the boat" occurs five times in Mark (4:1; 5:18; 6:45; 8:10.13) and twice in Luke (5:3; 8:37). The fact that the lake-space is more familiar to Mark than to Luke means that the information of the two gospels reflect different ecological scenarios.

TABLE 2

Mark	Luke
1:9 Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee	3:21 no indication of place
1:21 Capernaum	4:31 Capernaum, a city in Galilee,
9:30 They . . . passed through Galilee	9:43b 21 no indication of place
9:33 When they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house	9:46 no indication of place
8:22–26 Bethsaida	Luke omission
8:27 Caesarea of Philippi	9:18–21 no indication of place
14:3–9 Bethany	7:36–50 no Bethany
6:53 Gennesaret	Luke omission
8:10 Dalmanutha	Luke omission
Mark mentions seven lake crossings	Luke omits five of seven lake crossings
3:7–8 and a great multitude from Galilee followed him hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from	6:17 Luke omits
– Judea,	– Galilee
– Jerusalem,	– Idumea
– Idumea,	– beyond the Jordan
– beyond the Jordan,	
– the region around Tyre and Sidon.	

Also Matthew 4:24–25 corrects Mark, because his focus is not only Tyre and Sidon but “all Syria”. The geographical imagination of Matthew is opposite to that of Luke. Mark’s focus was on the villages near the two cities and not on the coast (as in Luke), or in the internal regions of Syria (as in Matthew). See Luke’s modifications of Mark in Table 2.

The attention of Luke to the Mediterranean coast is also confirmed by the Acts of the Apostles, where the towns of Tyre and Sidon are mentioned mainly as havens.³⁷

37 G. Theissen had already underlined the particular focus of Luke on the Mediterranean Sea: “Es ist darüber hinaus von der umfassenderen Lokalperspektive des Luke bestimmt: Der Verfasser des LkEv ist der einzige Evangelist, bei dem wir sicher sind, daß er mit der großen Welt des Mittelmeers und der Mittelmeerstädte vertraut ist” (Theissen 1985, 10).

We came in sight of Cyprus; and leaving it on our left, we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre because the ship was to unload its cargo there. We looked up the disciples and stayed there for seven days [...]. When our days there were ended, we left and proceeded on our journey; and all of them, with wives and children, escorted us outside the city. There we knelt down on the beach and prayed and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home. When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais (Acts 21:3–7).

When it was decided that we were to sail for Italy, they transferred Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort, named Julius. Embarking on a ship of Adramyttium that was about to set sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica. The next day we put in at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul kindly, and allowed him to go to his friends to be cared for (Acts 27:1–3).

Basically, the author of Luke must have pondered deeply on the localizations made in Mark, assuming a critical attitude toward them, and/or omitting Mark's indication of places. Luke may also have had a polemical attitude toward the followers located in those areas. The reasons underlying this critical stance possibly depended on the fact that Luke based himself on information originating in Jerusalem, in the coastal area of Judea and in Samaria. He also had information coming from Antioch, Asia Minor, Greece and Italy, as is demonstrated by Acts from 11:19 onwards. It is likely that Luke believed that Mark's information was, at least in part, unreliable. At the same time, he may also have thought that Mark's narrative strategy (which induced him to localize the arrival and departure points of Jesus' movements) was misleading. For this reason, Luke was sometimes induced to emphasize that a given episode occurred in an unknown place, in discordance with or in opposition to Mark, or to omit the localities given by Mark, as already noted (Luke 9:46 // Mark 9:33; omission of the episode in Mark 8:22–26; Luke 13:6–9 // Mark 11:12–14; omission of Jesus' journey to Tyre and Sidon and the return through the Decapolis; omission of Gennesaret in Mark 6:53; and Dalmanutha in Mark 8:10).

Luke avoids systematically to call Sea the lake of Galilee. In Luke the see is only the Meditarrean. See also Luke 21:25. "Sofern in ihnen [the gospels] der galiläische See ein Meer genannt wird, haben wir Traditionen vor uns, die aus der Umgebung des galiläischen Sees stammen. Sofern die Evangelienredaktionen diesen Sprachgebrauch übernehmen, dürfen wir vermuten, daß das Mittelmeer in der Lebenswelt der Evangelisten keine zentrale Rolle spielt" (*ivi*, 9).

The conclusion we arrive at is of some significance, as it confirms one of the hypotheses presented at the beginning. Reciprocal ignorance was widespread, due precisely to the different locations of the authors. The followers were unaware of information possessed by other groups, or sometimes rejected it for reasons linked to their specific place of residence.

11 The Place Indications in Luke's Special Material

The special sources used by Luke reveal a focus on the areas of Judea near Jerusalem and Samaria.³⁸ Only in one case they mention a Galilean village (Nain), which, however, is very close to Samaria.³⁹

The special material of Luke introduces indications of places that are not mentioned by Mark:

1. An unidentified town in the mountain of Judea where Elizabeth lives (1:39)
2. Bethlehem (2:4)
3. Jerusalem as place of pilgrimage of Jesus' relatives (2:41)
4. Nazareth as the place of Jesus' infancy (2:51)
5. Some synagogues of Judea where Jesus preached, probably alone (4:44)⁴⁰
6. A Samaritan village that rejects Jesus' disciples (9:52)
7. A village probably in Galilee where Marta lives (10:38)
8. Emmaus in Judea (north of Jerusalem) (24:13)
9. Nain (7:11), a Galilean village near Samaria⁴¹

38 The author of the special material of Luke shows a particular "interest for names of places" (Klein 1987, 38–42). On the spaces in Luke see Moles 2013.

39 Symptomatically Luke (19:1) situates in Jericho not the healing of Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46) but the conversion of Zacchaeus. That probably implies very divergent local information.

40 Bovon thinks that Luke with "Judea" "entends, semble-t-il, l'ensemble du pays et non pas la seule région méridionale" (Bovon 1991, 220). "Tout cela ne veut pas dire que, derrière Marc et Luc, ne se cache pas une information ancienne et, souvent, sûre, non pas certes des souvenirs de Pierre, comme l'on prétend souvent, mais des épisodes isolés que les premiers chrétiens se sont transmis oralement (*ivi*, 220).

41 "La ville de Naïn est située au nord du Mont Tabor au pied nord de la montagne de Djébel Dahi, sur la route qui monte du Lac de Gennésareth à la plaine de Jesréel [...] il faut distinguer notre Naïn d'un Naïn que connait Josèphe, *Bell Jud.* IV, 9, 4–5 §513–514" (Bovon 1991, 352). "Étant donné les tendances syncrétistes qui régnaient alors en Galilée, on peut localiser en cette région la tradition que Luc a retravaillé, plus particulièrement dans un milieu du christianisme primitif où la typologie Elie-Jésus et la force d'une divinité

10. Luke 13:34–35 probably presupposes various presences of Jesus in Jerusalem
11. Luke 17:11 writes that Jesus goes through Samaria (and Galilee).⁴²

The special materials of Luke therefore focus on the areas of Judea around Jerusalem and Samaria. Only in one case, as we have seen, they speak of a Galilean village (Nain). It is also interesting that in 19:1 Luke corrects Mark's reference to Jericho. In Jericho Luke's Jesus does something different from what is recounted in Mark. The conversion of the tax collector Zacchaeus, substitutes the healing of the blind man Bartimaeus. This suggests that perhaps the local information was actually different. In any case, all this means that, as social distinct entities with specific backgrounds, the different local groups offer significant discordant insights (see Figure 1: Places of origin of sources of the Gospels).

12 Indications of Places in the Special Material of Matthew

As mentioned above, Matthew states that Galilee was the last place in which Jesus was present after the resurrection). At the same time, Galilee was for this Gospel the starting place of the post-Jesus movement.

The special sources of Matthew probably come from places in High Galilee, from Syria (but not from the Mediterranean coast of Syria) and from somewhere beyond the Jordan river (2:1; 19:1; 4:24–25). In general, we can see that Matthew confirms the locations indicated by Mark. Here, we limit ourselves to three passages where the divergence from Mark is symptomatic for understanding the localization of the author of Matthew and the information on which he relied. The first point has already been analyzed. In 4:24–25, Matthew argues that the fame of Jesus was widespread “throughout Syria”, and also

guérissante étrangère s'étaient confondues. Un exploit aussi extraordinaire fut sans scrupule attribué à Jésus, l'homme de Dieu”. “Ces récits avaient une fonction missionnaire: ils faisaient rayonner, sous une forme narrative quelque chose du message de salut [...] Ils fortifiaient aussi le peuple dans sa foi et motivaient son éthique” (*ivi*, 352).

42 Strangely, Luke affirms that Jesus going to Jerusalem travels across Samaria and Galilee and not the contrary, as would be geographically logic. The fact engendered considerable controversy, also about Luke's knowledge of the geography of the Land of Israel. Bovon (2001, 129) translates διήρχετο διὰ μέσον Σαμαρείας καὶ Γαλιλαίας: “Il traversait, Lui, en longeant la frontière entre Samarie et Galilée”.

includes the Decapolis. This means that Matthew has information on the area to the northeast of the Lake of Galilee. The second fact concerns the statement:

when Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan (Matthew 19:1).

In the expression “beyond the Jordan” (*peran tou Iordanou*), Matthew seems to look toward Judea from a point of view situated not in Judea but in a trans-Jordan region. Thus, perhaps, the place in which the author resides is east of the River Jordan.

A third point confirms Matthew's interest in the east of the Land of Israel. The narrative begins with the Magi coming from the East. Matthew 2:1 states:

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem”.

According to Matthew, the Magi receive (by means of astrology) a divine revelation about the birth of the king of the Jewish people. This fact seems to legitimate Matthew's interest in the conversion of populations to the east of the Land of Israel. Therefore, the story seems to presuppose the existence of groups of Jesus' followers in eastern territories (see Figure 1: Places of origin of sources of the Gospels).

The localization of groups of Jesus' followers to the east of the Land of Israel can perhaps be confirmed by the letters of Paul. Immediately after his adhesion to Jesus, Paul says that he went to Arabia and subsequently to Damascus, mainly to unidentified areas lying in any case north-east of the Land of Israel (Gal 2:17). We must therefore assume that—shortly after the mid-thirties, i.e. not long after the death of Jesus—there were followers in Arabia and Damascus. If the story of the Acts had some historical basis, we might even presume that Jesus' followers were present in Damascus, even before Paul's arrival (Acts 9:2).⁴³

If we investigate not only Matthew's mentions of places, but also his mental ecology, we may identify other important hints to the localization of his writing and of the sources underpinning it. Matthew pays attention to mountainous regions (see Table 3).⁴⁴

43 Acts 9:2–30 however is not well compatible with many aspects of Paul's account in Gal 1:17.

44 For the Matthean usage of the term *oros* see Schenk 1987, 374–375.

TABLE 3 *Matthew's implicit ecological scenario: the mountains*

Matthew	Mark	Luke
4:8 a very high mountain		
5:1 he went up the mountain		6:17 on a level place
5:14 A city built on a hill		
8:1 down from the mountain		
14:23 he went up the mountain	he went up on the mountain 6:46	
15:29 he went up the mountain		
17:1 he led them up a high mountain	and led them up a high mountain 9:2	He went up on the mountain 9:28
17:9 coming down the mountain	coming down the mountain 9:9	down from the mountain 9:37
17:20 to this mountain		to this mulberry tree
18:12 on the mountains		in the wilderness 15:4
21:1 the Mount of Olives	the Mount of Olives 11:1	the Mount of Olives 19:28
21:21 if you say to this mountain	to this mountain 11:23	
24:3 the Mount of Olives	the Mount of Olives 14:26	
24:16 flee to the mountains	flee to the mountains 13:14	flee to the mountains 21:21
26:30 the Mount of Olives	the Mount of Olives 14:26	the Mount of Olives 22:39
28:16 (he went) to the mountain		

First of all, the statistical evidence is indicative. He uses the word “mountain” (*oros*) in the singular or plural 16 times, against Luke’s 9, Mark’s 8 and John’s 4. Four separate times, Matthew sets a crucially significant action of Jesus on a mountain, while Mark and Luke either omit the episode or contradict Matthew’s localization: Satan leads Jesus to a very high mountain (Matthew 4:8) while Luke does not mention this; Jesus pronounces his great speech of chapters 5–7 on a mountain (Matthew 5:1; 8:1) and Luke contradicts him, writing that Jesus was in a level place. In 15:29 only Matthew states that the healing of many sick people took place on a mountain. Finally, the last apparition of

the risen Jesus in Galilee occurred on “the mountain” (28:16), an episode completely absent in Luke, Mark and John (See Table 2).

However, also some of the sayings that Matthew attributes to Jesus presuppose a mountain environment, a mental ecology in which the scenario is an area with a mountainous horizon or suggesting a mountain environment. Only in Matthew does Jesus state that a city on a mountain cannot be hidden (5:14). Matthew twice reports a saying of Jesus on the power of faith (17:20; 21:21), on both occasions telling the disciples that if they have faith, they will be able to command a mountain to move. Luke reports the first case only, once again correcting Matthew: it is a mulberry tree, not a mountain, which is uprooted and flung into the sea.

13 Localizations of Jesus' Activity in John

According to chapter 20 of John (the last chapter in a previous redaction), Jesus appears in Jerusalem three times (John 20:14–18; 19–23, 27–29). The second apparition has a very special meaning: Jesus transmits the Holy Spirit to the disciples, giving them the power to forgive sins and he sends them out with authority: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (20:21–23). We are therefore confronting the final act of Jesus' mission and the beginning of that of his disciples after his death. The story is on the same level as those in Matthew 28:18–20 (the sending of the disciples to preach to all peoples), Luke 24:47s. and Acts 1:8.

In localizing this episode in Jerusalem, John's chapter 20 is in agreement with the vision of Luke, and shows distance from those of Mark and Matthew. However, the appearances of the risen Jesus in John are not the same as in Luke. Moreover, the transmission of the Spirit takes place during the second appearance, and Jesus himself transmits the Spirit to his followers. In Luke, this transmission takes place on the day of Shavuot, after Jesus' ascension and Jesus is not present. This seems to be further evidence that, in Jerusalem and its environments, different groups of Jesus' followers existed, which transmitted information that could be very dissimilar and conflicting. It suggests that in Jerusalem between the death of Jesus and the Jewish War, there was a “fractionation” of Jesus' followers, as was the case in other major centers, such as Antioch, Ephesus, and second-century Rome (Lampe 2003, 357–412; Trebilco 2013).

In the subsequent redaction, when chapter 21 was added, John seems to seek a conciliation with the vision of Mark/Matthew, because Jesus appears to seven disciples in Galilee, on the shore of the lake, and entrusts Simon Peter with the mandate to guide the “flock” (21:15–19). Of course, Jesus attributes an

authority to Peter at different times (before Jesus' death in Matthew, after his resurrection in John) and in a different place (in John by the lake, in Matthew at Caesarea Philippi), but both episodes take place in Galilee. In John 21, moreover, the last earthly appearance of Jesus is in Galilee on the lakeshore, and not on the mountain as in Matthew.

Perhaps, at the end of the first century or beginning of the second, when Chapter 21 of John's Gospel was written, it still seemed very important to recognize Galilee as the place of Jesus' appearances and of his final instructions concerning his succession. It is worth noting that, as previously mentioned, in Galilee Jesus assigned the guidance to Peter and not to the beloved disciple. It means that groups of Jesus' disciples in Galilee at the end of the century were both present and important. It should be added that the episode related in chapter 21 has a synoptic character insofar as it reports a miraculous catch of fish that is also found in chapter 5 of Luke and, as in Luke, it is linked to the figure of Peter. Hence, the groups with whom the definitive redaction seeks reconciliation seemed still strong and active at that time. They claimed legitimation in the authority of Peter and seem to have been located in the areas named in the Gospel of Matthew (see Bernabé 2010, 331–333). We can therefore add that the "fractionation" among Jesus' groups in the same territory and the same place also occurred in Galilee and, probably, in Capernaum.

The attempt at conciliation between the Galilean and the Jerusalemite localizations of Jesus' last moments that emerges in John 21 requires further investigation. We need to build a general scheme of the localizations of Jesus' activity in John, which are very different from those of Luke and Mark/Matthew.

The general pattern of Jesus' dislocation in John is relatively simple. John's Jesus goes to Galilee three times: immediately after having gathered five disciples around himself; he returns there after the Pharisees in Judea find out that he is administering more baptisms than the Baptist himself (4:3); then John sets in Galilee the events of chapter 6 before a Passover feast (6:1–4), with Jesus remaining there for an unspecified period. In this time, Jesus takes refuge in Galilee to escape the danger of death that threatens him in Judea (7:1).

After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him (7:1).

Subsequently, Jesus goes to Judea, where he remains until his death.

The places in Galilee mentioned by John are, first of all, Cana, where Jesus went twice (2:1; 4:46) immediately after returning from Judea. This means that in the Gospel of John, this location is more important than Capernaum. Then comes Capernaum, the village named as the place Jesus goes to with his mother, brothers and disciples after the wedding of Cana (2:11). In the story of

chapter 6, Capernaum assumes much greater significance. This chapter, however, is the one closest to the material of the Synoptic Gospels: Jesus and the disciples cross the lake by boat from Tiberias (the multiplication of food, 6:5–13) and Capernaum (speech in the synagogue, 6:59). No other places in Galilee are mentioned. John only says that Jesus “travelled around Galilee” (7:1).

In addition, John relates that Jesus crossed Samaria once and stopped two days at Sychar, where a group of followers originated following his activity (4:30). It would seem, then, that John was aware of the existence of Samaritan followers of Jesus, before his death.

The scenario of localization of Jesus and his followers in Judea is rather different from that of Luke. John knows two places called Bethany: one on the far side the Jordan (1:28) and one on the Jerusalem side (11:1.18; 12:1).

The visits of Jesus to Jerusalem are well known: on the first occasion (2:13), a group of followers formed—“many believed in his name” (2:23), including one of the leaders, Nicodemus (3:1). Immediately afterward, his activity took him to various locations in Judea (3:22), where he made many disciples and baptized (4:1–2). Jesus went to Jerusalem a second time for an unspecified Jewish festival (5:1), and a third, for the feast of Shelters (7:10). He returned a fourth time for the feast of Dedication (10:22), but he does not seem to have gone back to Galilee between the two feasts, and so we have to imagine his presence in Judea in places that remain unknown. After the feast of Dedication:

He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there [...] And many believed in him there (John 10:40.42).

Thus, according to John, a group of followers existed in the Transjordan area, that is, in southern Perea, among the places frequented by the Baptist. Then,

Jesus [...] went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples (John 11:54).

The author of John therefore seems to know another area of Judea in which Jesus was active. Finally, we saw that he mentions the village of Bethany near Jerusalem. To sum up, he knows a series of villages in eastern Judea around Jerusalem and north and east of the city. It is a scenario that is entirely absent in the other three canonical gospels (see Figure 1: Places of origin of sources of the Gospels).

The presence of disciples not mentioned in the other three gospels, such as the beloved disciple, Nathanael and Nicodemus, as well as the greater amount

of information concerning Thomas, are data that seem to confirm the existence of sources unknown to the authors of the Synoptic Gospels.

14 A General Image of the Locations of the Groups of Followers after Jesus' Death

The comparison between the texts of Mark and Matthew, on the one hand, and Luke and the Lukan special materials, on the other, gives rise to the question of why Mark and Matthew place the start of Jesus' activity in Galilee, while Luke places it in Jerusalem.

The contradiction cannot be explained by an attempt at harmonization, because the stories are not reconcilable. Neither can it be affirmed that one of the two transmissions, or both, sought deliberately to alter the representation of the course of events. Our hypothesis is that two different groups (or two constellations of groups) in different places gave rise to two different sections of the post-Jesus movement and different lines of transmission. All such groups were in search of legitimation. The explanation must therefore be sought in the difference of locations of the groups. The emissaries or narrators or simple believers of certain groups passed on their information to Mark and Matthew. Under similar conditions different or contrasting information was passed on to Luke and John.

The spatial imagination of early Christian groups is highly revealing. The visions of Luke-Acts, of Mark/Matthew, Q and John, reflect groups who were probably distant and/or in some way in conflict. Their disputes are reflected in the different representations of Jesus' sphere of action. The controversies evidently depend on distinct general strategies, but also on the autonomous origins of such groups of followers. In other words, at least for a few decades, the various groups appear to be in disagreement as to the interpretation to give to Jesus' message. They perhaps had distinct opinions about the role to be recognized to each group within the post-Jesus movement.⁴⁵

Taken together, the above evidence suggests that, at least for a few decades, some groups were transmitting their own information and were one dissimilar from the other. They were isolated or scarcely interacting. It is reasonable to think that they entered into contact with each other only after they had developed independently. When they did begin to communicate, it is plausible that diver-

45 This fact is also confirmed by the conflicts existing within Pauline *ekklêsiai* (see for example 1Cor 1:12). On the conflicts between Paul and his adversaries see Penna, 1991, 135–149.

gent or conflictual evaluations arose among them over events, explanations and roles. For instance, Luke seems to be willing to ignore the activity of the Galilean groups. The Galileans, on their part, seem reluctant to accept coordination with the Temple institutions and central Jewish authorities, preferring to maintain the character of an independent movement.

Mark/Matthew and John 21 insist on a continuity of Jesus' movement in Galilee (before and after Jesus' death). Luke, conversely, stresses the importance of discontinuity indicating a new beginning in Jerusalem.⁴⁶ It appears that the different strategies of territorial expansion of the groups were determined, at least partly, by a dissimilar perception of the danger represented by Roman power. For Luke, the followers sought to integrate with the Roman world, while Matthew's vision is strongly conditioned by his expectations of persecutions by the Roman and Jewish authorities. Matthew's strategy is that of a minority group in danger. Luke's attitude is that of a loyalist group seeking integration. Also in John, in the final redaction, Judea is seen as a place of danger. The author of chapter 21 might have thought of Galilee as a safer place, a site for the defense and expansion of his group.

From the exploration of the different locations, we can now arrive at a conclusion based on two factors. In the first place, the theoretical considerations of the anthropology of space (mainly T. Ingold 2004a; M. Augé 1992), the sociology of the space (M. Halbwachs 2008) and the studies on urban environments (K.A. Lynch 1960), highlight that the localization of Jesus' activity—both in the earliest accounts and in the earliest Christian texts—constitutes a necessary element for understanding the environments of informers, narrators and writers, and their mental maps. Secondly, the diversity of spatial scenarios in the gospels can be explained (a) by dependency on different locations of the groups that transmitted the information or (b) by the inevitable adherence of the writers themselves to particular groups of Jesus' followers. It does not simply depend on a purely literary or theological strategy.

In summary, on the basis of the different places of Jesus' appearances and the different localizations present in the four gospels, we can formulate a quadripartite hypothetical framework. We can assemble our investigation on canonical gospels as follows.

46 See A. Destro, "Spaces and Religion: Essential, Supplementary and Interstitial Dimensions", paper presented at the conference on: *Spatialising Practices: Landscapes, Mindscales, Socioscapes. Towards a Redescriptive Companion to Graeco-Roman Antiquity* (Loutraki, 23–26 June 2013).

(a) On the basis of Mark, we can hypothesize the existence of:

- a number of groups residing in villages in the area of Tyre and, perhaps, around Sidon and upper Galilee (close to Caesarea Philippi)
- a number of groups situated in Galilee, east, west and north of the Lake of Galilee: Capernaum, Gennesarest, Dalmanutha, Jerash /Gadara.

(b) On the basis of Matthew, we can imagine the probable existence of:

- groups located in Syria to the east of Tyre and Sidon
- in the northeast of Galilee
- in Transjordan

(c) On the basis of Luke and his special materials, we can suppose:

- groups located in Jerusalem and in the Mediterranean coastal area of Judea
- some groups in Samaria and Antioch.

(d) On the basis of John, we may hypothesize:

- a Jerusalemite group different from that on which Luke is based
- groups of followers in Galilee, at Cana and Tiberias
- groups in Judea, around Jerusalem and also to the north (Ephraim; Aenon)
- groups in Transjordan/southern Perea: Bethany and other locations
- groups in Samaria (Sychar).

What is worth noting is that these different groups of followers did not constitute a vast unity that could be called a “church” or “Christianity”, or “Christian community”. In concrete terms, they should be regarded as aggregated bodies or constellations of Jewish groups within Jewish society, who were undergoing a deep multiform process of cultural evolution.

See Figure 1: Places of origin of sources of the Gospels.⁴⁷

47 Map by dr. Facundo Troche.

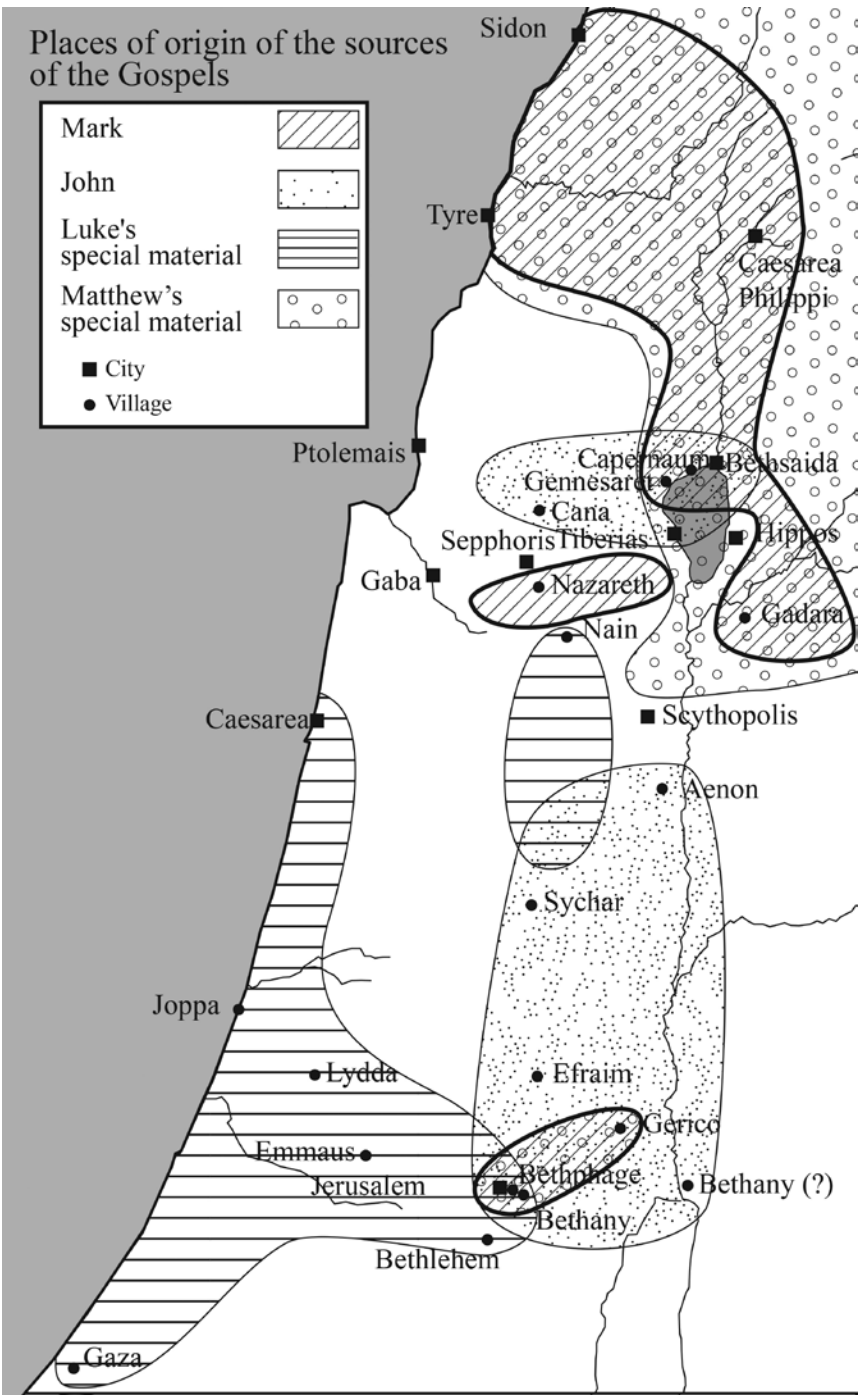


FIGURE 1

Divergent Lines of Transmission and Memory: The Passion Narratives in Mark and John

This analysis¹ is part of a research concerning Jesus' death (Destro – Pesce 2014a). It concentrates on the texts dealing with the so-called Jesus' "passion". We intend to examine some dissimilarities between the Johannine and the Markan passion narratives,² and to investigate about their origins. We take into consideration their distinctive elements, some close literary affinities between them, and some attempts in John to rectify or criticize Mark's account. Finally, we present some remarks about the origin of the divergencies between the two narratives in the light of some theories on social memory.

A detailed comparison between John's and Mark's passion narratives has been undertaken many times.³ Aware of the importance and extension of this comparative analysis, we confine to a brief summary of our findings on the mutual relationship of the two texts that may illuminate the relation between text and memory.⁴

1 Major Distinctive Elements of the Two Passion Narratives

We propose a first provisional ethnographical analysis of the two passion narratives avoiding presuppositions about dates and redactional layers. Our aim is to highlight differences and similarities in content and literary form between

1 A first version of this paper was presented at the SBL Annual Meeting in Chicago on November 17, 2012.

2 "Passion narrative" is a term that refers above all to the sufferings endured by Jesus during his arrest, torture and execution. The narratives actually embrace a chain of events involving different figures, institutions, groups of people (crowds, women and men), not simply the person of Jesus. The narrators express a multiplicity of aims that are not limited to Jesus' suffering.

3 See Mohr 1982; Myllykoski 1991; Garland 1989; R.E. Brown 1994; Dormeyer 1974, 1995; Crossan 1996; Wills 1997; Lang 1999; Anderson 2006, 202–212, and the bibliography quoted below.

4 We accept John's Gospel as a witness of independent streams of transmission of information about Jesus. John's text cannot be considered only as a theological reflection and a critical reworking of the Synoptics (see Destro-Pesce, 2000; Anderson 2006; Charlesworth 2010). In addition, we do not take in consideration the radical thesis of a "John's priority".

the two texts. The comparison is limited to the narration that begins immediately after the exit of Jesus and his followers from the building of the last supper (Mark 14:26 // John 18:1) and ends with visit of the women to the empty tomb (Mark 16:8 / John 20:2). In order to facilitate the comparison, we have divided the two texts into small literary units. We are conscious that the division in units is a very subjective exegetical operation that can be done in different ways with different results. However, every ethnography must presuppose clear delimitations of the observed field. We present here only some points of the whole comparison.

Mark's account presents 30 distinctive elements (events and/or words) that are not found in John (see Appendix 1). John's account has 23 elements that are absent from Mark (see Appendix 2).⁵

The number of the elements peculiar to one narrative and absent from the other could have been different, if we had included all little or minor details present in John or in Mark. For example, in John's episode of the cutting of the ear of the High Priest's servant, we have counted as one distinctive element (see Appendix 2) the fact that John 18:10–11 adds (a) the names of Simon Peter and Malchus, and (b) Jesus' command to Peter to lay down his sword.

What is important, for our discourse, is in any case the fact that dissimilarities in the two passion narratives are significant and numerous. The differences of the accounts are due to the fact that the distinctive elements confer an exclusive meaning to the narrations of the respective authors.

In John, there are at least three elements of this kind. First, the meeting of the Sanhedrin, with the decision to put Jesus to death occurs many days before his arrest, after the resurrection of Lazarus (11:47–53). From that moment on, the authorities, having already condemned Jesus, look for a way to capture him (11:57). For this reason, in his account of Jesus' capture, John narrates only the arrest and has no need to say that the Sanhedrin meets (as occurs in Mark). His account therefore concentrates on Pilate, Jesus, and the Jews who denounced him. Second, John insists on the fact that Jesus spontaneously offers himself to death and decides to accept it before the last supper (in an extraordinary episode that only John narrates in 12:31–33). In Mark, by contrast, the decision to condemn Jesus to death is taken by the Sanhedrin during the night after his arrest. Moreover, it is only in the night that Jesus surrenders to his death during the prayer in the Gethsemane. Third, John gives a narrative of the abandonment of the disciples that is symptomatically different from Mark (John 18:8–9; Mark 14:27.49).

5 On John's differences with the synoptics gospels, on synoptic omissions in John and on Johannine omissions in the synoptics see Anderson 2007, 16–27. See also Anderson 2006, 127–174.

As we will see in the course of the analysis, the existence of contrasting statements in Mark and John testifies against the persistence of an unalterable memory and the reliability of fixed and homogeneous forms of memory in the transmission about Jesus' death.

In all three cases the two accounts presuppose an *implicit* narrative element common to both. In the first case, what is common is the information that the Sanhedrin was gathered in order to decide about the death of Jesus. In the second, the common element is a question about Jesus' acceptance to die. In the third, both narratives presuppose that the disciples left Jesus alone after his arrest. The question is: why Mark and John give different accounts of these common elements?

Did they receive from a previous transmission two already divergent accounts of the same element? Might the distinctive accounts of the gospels be the result of their different theological interpretation of a common previous narrative? Or did John know Mark's text and in all three cases did he decide to present an alternative version? And did this alternative version depend on a personal Johannine creative theology or/and was it based on an independent stream of information?

If we have two autonomous lines of transmission that end in the two narratives, we have to suppose that many independent streams of information existed and therefore that these divergent lines testify against a faithful transmission of memories.

If John depended on Mark and decided to modify his version, this means that Mark was not normative or really reliable in his opinion. And this means also that John did not believe that all the lines of transmission in early Christianity were reliable. The aim of his writing was therefore polemical. But this means also that he did not consider a pure remembering as the basis of a faithful representation of Jesus.

2 Common Episodes Narrated in the same Sequence in John's and Mark's Passion Narratives

The two accounts have in common a series of 26 events or elements (Appendix 3).⁶ It is significant that in both narratives *the sequence* of events

6 On the pre-Markan passion narrative see S. Guíjarro 2003. On the pre-synoptic passion narratives see: Linnemann 1970; Dauer 1972; Schneider 1972a; Crossan 1988, 16–30; Theissen 1989b; Fortna 1998; Vidal 1997, 232–287; Soards, 1492–1524; Soards 1991, 334–350; Kelber 1976; Reinbold 1994; Schneider and Stenger 1971; Lang 1999. Among the commentaries: Yarbrough Collins 2007, 620–779; J. Marcus 2009, 924–1078.

is identical, except in three cases (John 18:10, Peter cut off the right ear of high priest's slave before Jesus' arrest; 19:67, the request of crucifixion after Barabbas' liberation; 19:23–24, the division of Jesus' cloths after the mention of the cross inscription⁷). The three cases seem to depend on different narrative logic, rather than on a different order of events known to the two authors.

The fact that Mark and John share a series of elements in more or less the same order⁸ could be explained in three different ways: Mark used the text of John, or John used the text of Mark, or both made use of a same (oral or written) earlier text. If John and Mark made use of the same previous passion narrative,⁹ its content cannot be reconstructed only on the basis of the common elements present in both texts. First, each of the two accounts might have intentionally omitted precise elements of the supposed common narrative. Second, some elements present only in Mark or only in John could have belonged to the text on which the two gospels depend. This means that on the basis of the elements common to Mark and John is rather difficult to individuate the beginning and the extension of a presumed pre-gospel passion narrative.¹⁰

In particular, from the series of the shared elements we cannot know whether the earlier presumed common text contained one or two meetings of the Sanhedrin leading to Jesus' condemnation to death (as in Mark), or contained only his arrest and his consignment to Pilate (as in John). We do not even understand whether the earlier text contained the prayer in Gethsemane when Jesus asks to be spared death (as in Mark), or—on the contrary—Jesus' voluntary surrender to those who arrest him (as in John); or, again, whether the account specified the time of the crucifixion and death as in Mark, or followed the times indicated in John. We do not know whether Jesus' last words on the cross—in the presumed common pre-gospels narrative—were those given by Mark or by John. In conclusion, the common or shared elements do not permit the reconstruction of a complete earlier narrative used independently by Mark and John.

7 John 13:38 could be a fourth case.

8 See also Anderson 2006, 104.108.130.143–144; cf. his table 4.2 “Memorable Sayings common to John and Mark”, 131–132.

9 Guijarro 2003, 357–358 writes: “La valoración de las coincidencias como un criterio para asignar un pasaje al RPMcP, o de las divergencias para no hacerlo, presupone que Mc y John conocieron y utilizaron de forma independiente un mismo relato pre-canónico de la pasión. Esta afirmación es muy discutible. Algunos autores piensan, incluso, que John conoció y utilizó los relatos sinópticos. Por otro lado, es muy difícil que ambos conocieran el mismo relato. Es mucho más probable que conocieran relatos compuestos a partir de la misma tradición”. See also: Mohr 1982.

10 On the beginning of the pre-synoptic passion narrative, see Schneider 1972; Theissen 1989b, 180–182.

In other words, our comparison reveals the difficulty of reconstructing the previous text and even the uncertainty of its existence. It does not support the theory that Mark and John were based on the same pre-gospel ancient nucleus of narration about Jesus' passion, around which they would have added more or less detailed variants.¹¹ It also results difficult to establish if John has known only the written text of Mark, or an oral version also known by Mark, or rather a pre-Johannine passion account. We are also faced by the problem of knowing whether the distinctive elements of John's account are theological creations or rather depend on previous sources and transmissions. All these doubts show how it is hard to reconstruct the processes of transmission of information about Jesus. All this goes against the hypothesis that the historical reliability of the Gospels can be demonstrated by supposed faithful memorizations processes.

A conclusion that can be drawn is that Mark and John showed great freedom in adding, omitting and modifying the data of the previous transmission. This means that the way in which the author of a written text deals with previous materials is personal and distinctive and hard to identify.

Choices, creative interventions, and specific omissions are not simple 'acts of memory'. They constitute mechanisms of the medium of writing. The written text can delete old information, transform them or add new ones, but above all can create perspectives and projects. Again, this goes against the idea that pure memory processes are determining the historical reliability of the Gospels.

3 Short or Long Versions of Specific Episodes

It is important to consider the number of common elements in the two Gospels, but this is not sufficient. We believe that it is essential to take account of their length or brevity. Actually, there are three particular cases where Mark provides a very brief report of a fact that is presented in a more extensive way in John (Mark 14:47 vs. John 18:10–11; Mark 14:54 vs. John 18:15–18; and Mark 15:2 vs. John 18:33b–38) (Table 1). We have also three cases where John's narrative is, conversely, shorter than in Mark (John 18:25–26 vs. Mark 14:66–72; John 18:39–40 vs. Mark 15:6–9; and John 19:2–3 vs. Mark 15:16–19) (Table 2).

11 See Yarbro Collins 2007, 625. Neither does a comparison of the two narratives in terms of a gist-relationship (see Zeba Krook 2012) lead to significant results. At most, it gives evidence of an uncertain and approximate central narrative thread used as a temporary working tool.

TABLE 1

Mark's shorter narrations	John's longer narrations
Mark 14:47 But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear.	John 18:10–11 Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?"
Mark 14:54 Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire.	John 18:15–18 Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.
Mark 15:2 Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him,	John 18:33b–38 Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?"

TABLE 1 (cont.)

Mark's shorter narrations	John's longer narrations
"You say so."	Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him.

TABLE 2

Mark's longer narrations	John's shorter narrations
Mark 14:66–72 While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said,	John 18:25–27 Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him,

Mark's longer narrations

John's shorter narrations

"You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth." But he denied it, saying,

"I do not know or understand what you are talking about."

And he went out into the forecourt.
Then the cock crowed.

And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them."

But again he denied it.

Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean."

But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know this man you are talking about."

At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

Mark 15:6–9

Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked.

Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them,

"You are not also one of his disciples, are you?"

He denied it and said,

"I am not."

One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?"

Again Peter denied it,

and at that moment the cock crowed.

John 18:39–40

But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover.

TABLE 2 (cont.)

Mark's longer narrations	John's shorter narrations
"Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Mark 15:16–19 Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown they put it on him. And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him.	Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a bandit. John 19:2–3 And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face.

Two facts are striking. First, the number of cases in which the two accounts reveal precise literary affinities is very limited. This circumstance contrasts with the great mass of elements specific to each one. Clearly, these literary similarities could point to either the dependence of both stories on the same earlier text (oral or written) or, equally, to a dependence of one on the other.

A literary dependence of John on the Markan text can be demonstrated only in the case of the disciple who cuts off the ear of the servant of the high priest (Mark 14:47–50 // John 18:10–11). Three literary terms link John to Mark: the term sword (*machaira*); the phrase: "struck the slave of the high priest" (*epaisēn ton tou archiereôs doulon*); the words "his ear" (*autou tou ôtarion*) (Lang 1999, 78–80);

John	μάχαιραν εἴλκυσεν αὐτὴν καὶ	ἔπαισεν τὸν τοῦ ἀρχιερέως δοῦλον
Mark	σπασάμενος τὴν μάχαιραν	ἔπαισεν τὸν δοῦλον τοῦ ἀρχιερέως
John	καὶ ἀπέκοψεν	αὐτοῦ τὸ ὠτάριον τὸ δεξιόν·
Mark	καὶ ἀφείλεν	αὐτοῦ τὸ ὠτάριον.

In addition, the final phrase, “Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?” (John 18:11), directly criticizes Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane as narrated in Mark 14:36 (“Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me”). It reveals in fact clear literary affinities with Mark’s passage (*patēr; potērion*):

John 18:11	τὸ ποτήριον ὃ δέδωκέν μοι ὁ πατήρ οὐ μὴ πῖω αὐτό;
Mark 14:36	αββα ὁ πατήρ, πάντα δυνατά σοι· παρένεγκε τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο ἅπ’ ἐμοῦ·

Relevant is the case of Peter’s denial (John 18:15–18.25–26 // Mark 14:54.66–72) (Borrell 1998). Both narratives insert Jesus’ interrogation before the Jewish religious authorities between the beginning and the end of Peter’s denial. The two parts of the story reveal some clearly common literary elements, which indicate a literary bond between the two texts and some clearly Johannine redactional features (for example: the door-keeper who lets Peter in at the request of the beloved disciple; the two corrections of the name Peter into Simon Peter; the mention of the relative of the high priest’s servant). The two versions differ in the fact that in Mark it is a servant-girl who poses two questions to Peter, while another question is asked by the menservants. By contrast, in John the girl asks one single question (18:17), another question is asked by those present (18:25) and a final question by one of the high priest’s servant (18:26). Mark shows signs of his redactional style in his interest for anecdotal expansions (Mark 14:66–72). All of this may suggest that both gospels may have freely interpreted an earlier text or oral narration of Peter’s denial. It should be excluded, perhaps, that the variants present in each text stem from two independent lines of transmission: they are plausibly explained as the outcome of the theological and/or narrative strategies of their authors.

A sign of John’s dependence on the written text of Mark could perhaps lie in the fact that the literary structure of the story of Peter’s denial follows a sandwich style of composition that is typical of Mark. A further symptom that John followed Mark appears at the beginning of the third part of the sandwich where John repeats exactly the phrase that concludes the first part of the sandwich (“Simon Peter was standing and warming himself”, 18:18.25) (see also Perrin 1971, 128; J. Marcus 2009, 1010).

Small literary relationships between Mark and John are a sure *trace* that an upstream link existed between them. The *traces* in this case are significant because they are unintentional (Destro-Pesce 2014b, 76–78). As symptom of a connection, they throw light on the fact that the act of writing of the Gospel is far from being separated from the previous transmission. It is possible but not certain, therefore, that an ancient account was known by both authors. If this story existed, it must be admitted that it may have spread through many transmission streams. It is also possible that Mark and John reworked the same account. In this case, they could however also depend on information known by only one of them.

In any case, the fact that traces of literary kinship are limited sheds light on the distinctive strategies of Mark and John. It shows how both addressed, selected, interpreted, expanded, or ignored the available materials.

It should be noted at this point, once again, that neither the Markan text nor the flow of information from which Mark depended was normative for John. John exerts a selection and a judgment on them that are dictated by his socio-cultural perspectives. Compared to processes of memorization, his writing (like all writings) represents a moment of break and of innovation. A conclusion that cannot be ignored is that the authors of the gospels want to correct the previous memory transmission.

In sum, various and divergent lines of transmission existed that were expression of precise and distinct groups of followers. The gospels are written, at least in part, as acts of polemical confrontation towards other lines of transmission. What seems to emerge is a conflict in early Christianity, a conscious struggle about past memories.

4 John's Polemical Interventions on Mark

John's modifications or corrections to Mark throw light on the interrelation between the two Gospels. The former often seems to contrast intentionally the latter. By contrast we do not find in Mark intentional corrections of John. The materials that are peculiar to John (see Appendix 2) contain statements that seem to have the precise aim to rectify or criticize the Gospel of Mark, or to present an alternative version.¹² The hypothesis that John criticizes Mark is based on phrases and words that appear more or less identical in the two gospels.

12 See also Anderson 2006, 110–112, "John's Correcting of Mark?".

(1) First example. In John 18:8–9 (as we have already noted) the disciples go away following an explicit request of Jesus to those who intended to arrest him (“if you are looking for me, let these men go”). This sounds as a John’s criticism towards two Mark’s statements in 14:49–50 and 14:27. In 14:50 Mark says: “All of them deserted him and fled”. Mark quotes the Jewish scriptures to demonstrate the necessity of the disciples’ flight (“for it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered”, 14:27). John, by contrast, quotes a word of Jesus to support the idea that was Jesus to ask that the disciples be permitted to go away:

John 18:8–9	Mark 14:49–50
Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.”	All of them deserted him and fled 14:27 And Jesus said to them: You will all become deserters; for it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered
This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, “I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.”	

(2) Second example. John (12:27–28a and 12:23a–24) seems to contradict explicitly two points of the prayer of Gethsemane reported by Mark 14:32b–14:42. First, Mark says:

he [...] prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said: Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want (14:35–36).

John’s Jesus on the contrary refuses to pray God to save him from death. John intentionally takes the same literary expression of Mark giving the opposite interpretation:

Now my soul is troubled. *And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’?* No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name (12:27–28a).

Mark 14:41b writes:

The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

John corrects:

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit (12:23a–24).

Here the use by John of the same literary expression of Mark (“The hour has come; the Son of Man . . .”) necessarily supposes a literary dependence.

John omits the prayer of Gethsemane and anticipates a different prayer the end of the last supper in chapter 17. He anticipates in chapter 12 an opposite version to the Gethsemane prayer, using the same literary expressions of Mark.¹³ These divergencies are significant because, in many other passages, John confines himself to narrating differently, in his personal way, without any polemical intent against Mark.¹⁴

In any case, the polemical attitude is in general an index of social complexity, innovation or instability. It can be assumed that polemical memories and/or disputes characterize a fragmented social construction with groups on the rise and/or in a state of distress, which strenuously compete with others.

5 Passages Revealing the Social Scenarios of the Two Authors

We now attempt to compare Mark and John moving from their position in the social context. In John the public sphere is more evident than in Mark. For example, he writes that Judas “brought the cohort” (18:3)—perhaps an entire contingent of the Roman army—in order to arrest Jesus. His narrative seems to locate the events within a greater social and institutional perspective.

Conversely, Mark focuses more on personal and private scenes (the dramatic time of prayer in Gethsemane is an example). The fact that Jesus is helped by Simon of Cyrene shows Mark’s preoccupation with Jesus’ physical suffering,

13 It is true that the theme of the hour is Johannine, but Mark could have used the expression “the hour” on the base of a pre-Markan and pre-Johannine text or tradition. However, this does not alter the fact that John is contrary to the interpretation that Mark gives to “the hour”.

14 Same opinion now also in Zumstein 2016, 661: “Im übrigen hat Joh die Gethsemane-Episode (Mark 14,32–42) weggelassen; lediglich Bruchstücke davon sind in John 12,23–27–28 aufgenommen und in einem neuen Zusammenhang gesetzt worden”.

while John represents Jesus carrying the cross on his own, making him less weak and much more visible and engaged.

In John, Jesus—crowned with thorns and dressed in purple—is shown to the public. In his narrative, the coming out of Pilate, four times, in order to speak to the Jewish authorities and the Jews, and even to solemnly announce the sentence, underlines the public impact of his actions. Jesus' condemnation has repercussion on the whole society. John emphasizes that the inscription on the cross was in three languages. This circumstance seems to highlight the importance of the public. From the point of view of John, it is plausible that the causes of Jesus' condemnation quickly become of general dominion. John implies a situation in which many might have had direct knowledge of the events and therefore could diffuse personal opinions. The statement "many Jews read this inscription" (19:20) is an acknowledgement that many persons knew that the charge against Jesus was that of having proclaimed himself "king of the Jews" (19:19,21). This means that many Jews could easily and publicly comment the causes that gave rise to the drama.

With regard to the public impact, in Mark, the women who find the empty tomb are too frightened to speak. Mark underlines their personal sentiment. The women keep what they have seen as a secret. By contrast, in John, Mary of Magdala assumes the function of primary witness. In John's perspective, the process of spreading of the information about Jesus' resurrection begins when Mary goes to Simon Peter and the disciple loved by Jesus, the two major followers. The fact that Jesus entrusts his mother to the beloved disciple, in the presence of Mary of Magdala, is a further sign of Jesus' actions being addressed to the public. In this context, the function of the beloved disciple is significant. He is constantly present from the arrest until the crucifixion. For John, he is an important witness of all the events concerning Jesus.

Mark mentions three times "the crowd". A mass of people is present at the arrest (14:43). Then (in 15:8,11,15) it is the crowd that calls for the liberation of Barabbas and twice demands the crucifixion of Jesus. Finally, the "bystanders" (in 15:29) insult Jesus on the cross. Mark's crowd is the instrument of the authorities. It participates to the arrest and physically assaults Jesus. Conversely, after the last supper, John's narrative makes no mention of the crowd. The fourth Gospel constructs his story through people indicated by name, whose identity and rank are known to him: Judas, Peter who cuts off the ear of the High Priest servant Malchus, the commander of the guards, a relative of Malchus, the beloved disciple, the women who stand by the cross. Various personages are identified by name and position. The categories of the people who arrest Jesus are clearly specified. In John, near the "high priests" and "the Pharisees" come into view "the Jews". The crowd, as undifferentiated multitude, is less

relevant. Probably the insufficient specificity of the term “crowd” made it inadequate to the image of the entire sequence of events built up by John. In other words, the text of John is more socially detailed than Mark in describing the social context.

Ultimately, Mark’s crowd may reflect the author’s uncertainty—or critical attitude—about the received information. The fact that he does not mention precise persons but an undifferentiated crowd may reveal that he was not in possession of accurate sources. In any case, he seems to be convinced that a large number of people had played a role in Jesus’ condemnation and death.

6 Observations about Transmission and Memory

Several scholars maintain that studies on memorization’s processes in early Christianity permit to affirm that the Gospels reproduce Jesus’ words and actions in an essentially correct way (e.g. Dunn 2001, 2003, 2008, 2013; Bauckham 2006; Mournet 2005). Their thesis, however, has been subjected to strong criticism (see Painter 2007; Weeden 2009; Redman 2010; Kloppenborg 2012; Crook 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2015, 2016; Norelli 2014b; van Eck 2015; Schröter 2008; Destro – Pesce 2014b, 46–69; Pesce 2014). The same scholars often affirm that the discrepancies among the gospels are not relevant and therefore do not undermine their historical reliability.

The data we have stressed, however, illustrate divergencies between Mark and John that are not secondary or of little importance. They concern essential contradictions. We add that in some cases John actually criticizes and corrects Mark. The affirmation that the divergencies among the gospels are not really relevant cannot be shared. In particular, it must be refuted in the case of the passion narratives. In the light of our comparison, also the theory that affirms that memorization processes in the transmission of information about Jesus were substantially reliable appears extremely problematic. For these reasons, we believe that an explanation of the divergencies among the Gospels requires first of all a recourse to the basic rules of the historical method. From an historical point of view the reliability of a text obviously depends on the reliability of its sources.

The considerable mass of distinctive material found in the accounts of Mark and John (see Appendix 1 and 2) requires, therefore, explanations about their origins. It is highly likely that the dissimilar materials of Mark and John derive from two different (oral or written) lines of transmission, independent

of each other, as can also be said of various other sections of the two gospels (Destro – Pesce 2011a, 13–15).

In our view, some differences between the texts of Mark and John induce to think that the places where the lines of oral transmission originated were dissimilar and that the narratives probably were produced by distant and unrelated groups of Jesus' followers. In other words, it is possible that dishomogeneous local origins played from the beginning an inevitable crucial role in differentiating the streams of transmissions.¹⁵

In this connection, we first hypothesize that, due to physical dispersion, each line of transmission may have had only partial knowledge of Jesus' story (words, actions, events). For many years, perhaps many decades, numerous types of transmission (formal and informal, ritual, within or outside households, etc.) may have developed in different times and places. Among the different groups of Jesus' followers there was—we stress again—hardly a reciprocal knowledge and contact (Destro – Pesce 2014b, 87–89). Some groups probably had no concrete interaction at all. The lacking of reciprocal connections for a rather long period, plausibly permitted the birth of a variety of stories and accounts. In our hypothesis, the sources used by Mark and John belong to groups that were substantially independent one from the other and lived in rather unrelated contexts.

Secondly, it is thanks to theoretical approaches on collective memory and psychology of memory¹⁶ that we can try to understand why the same events are differently reported by early groups of followers. M. Halbwachs theory of the formation of a collective memory could explain this process. This scholar distinguishes between the first phase of memory formation in which the witnesses refer an event and a second phase in which the memories assume a collective form. Halbwachs maintains that the most important divergencies—in the construction of memories—take place in the first phase. It is during this time that an event “*risque le plus de changer d'aspect, et qu'il est le plus difficile d'en fixer les traits*” (1941 [1971], 118). In Halbwachs's view, substantial

15 In Destro-Pesce 2014b, 99–113 and 123–131 we have tried to reconstruct the map of the different places of origin of Mark's and John's information.

16 Individual, collective, and cultural memories are not simple repetitions of past experiences. They are always selective, transformative and creative, oriented to the present needs, and imply distortion and forgetting: see especially Schacter 1996, 2001; Kandel 2007, 2009. See also Erll 2011; J. Assmann 1995; Baumeister – Hastings 1997; Berliner 2005; Bloch 1995, 1998; Butler 1989; Davis 2001; Lindsay 1990; Loftus – G.M. Davies 1984; D.G. Miller – Loftus 1976; Radstone-J. Schwartz 2010; Tomes-Katz 1997. See also Aguirre 2010, 200–204.

discrepancies between the witnesses take place immediately after the occurrence of an event.

Following Halbwachs, the first divergencies and distinct lines of transmission originate in the beginnings. In a second phase, the formation of a collective memory presupposes the existence of a homogeneous group. This may mean that the reliability of the information concerning Jesus is in question already in the very beginning of the transmission. Probably, the collective memory of Jesus' death, in early Christian literature, again according to Halbwachs's model, has developed slowly, rather late and differently in several local groups. In specific times and places it was functional to a different foundation of the "identity" of the earliest groups of followers. Following this model, it is highly probable that groups of early Jesus followers were characterized by many types of collective memories. We do not discuss the role of personal sensibility or intellectual invention. It is the dynamics of collective contexts that must be in the foreground.

To Mark's and John's passion narratives we cannot apply K. Bayley's theory of the faithful nucleus and secondary variations. Bailey's theory regards the telling of stories, the collective remembering of ancient narrations or poetical texts within a particular place (villages, small localities). It is not applicable to the first stage of formation of narratives relating to Jesus, because it refers to the transmission of already formalized oral narratives, and not to their initial phases of formation when they had not yet reached a standard collectively recognized form. The first transmissions about Jesus did not consist in already formalized accounts. A certain standardization of narratives took place only subsequently.

Bayley's theory, moreover, is in contrast with anthropological field studies on "traditions" and processes of memorization:

nombre d'anthropologues et d'historiens ont entrepris, depuis une trentaine d'années, à déconstruire la notion de 'tradition'. On appréhende dès lors la tradition dans toute société, moins comme un ensemble fixe de croyances et de coutumes transmises à travers un passé commun et plutôt, comme une réinterprétation continue, par la génération contemporaine des acteurs sociaux qui l'adoptent, de faits et d'attributs signifiants, véhiculés par des pratiques déterminées. C'est la manière de se resaisir du passé et non le passé lui même qui institue la tradition et donc la différence entre société traditionnelle et moderne. Cette différence résiderait dans les deux façons contrastées d'être affecté par le passé : celle consistant à le promouvoir en tradition et celle aboutissant à le constituer en histoire (Ariel De Vidas 2010).

7 What does Memory Mean for John?

In order to understand the processes of memorization, on which the gospels of Mark and John are based, it is necessary to raise questions about their conception of remembering.

a. We have often emphasized that John conceives memory as an act of struggle against forgetting (Destro – Pesce 2003c, 95–98; 2014b, 63–64). For John, Jesus embodies a supernatural reality that can only be perceived through a special cognitive process. Such process implies a supernatural inspiration (John 3:3; 4:10; 8:14; 8:27–28; 8:43; 9:39). Remembering Jesus is, of necessity, also a process in which the recalled words and deeds are reinterpreted in order to become completely understandable.

In John, it is the Spirit that recalls to Jesus' disciples the words that he spoke (14:26, he will "remind you of all I have said to you"), because they have forgotten or misunderstood them. True understanding is obtained in John only through the Spirit, after Jesus' death. Only after Jesus has died can the disciples obtain the "whole truth" (16:13), while during Jesus' life, they did not fully understand what he said and did. Thus, for John, remembering seems a prophetic act. We are very far from the idea of memory, intended as the faithful repetition of a content, under the presumed control of a leader, a community or a teacher.

Since true knowledge is attained through the Spirit, we may assume that the Gospel of John presupposes groups with prophetic characteristics. The texts that refer to this are, above all, the three famous passages of John 14:26; 15:26 and 16:13. In John 14:26, the Holy Spirit teaches the members of the Johannine group "everything": "the Holy Spirit [...] will teach you everything (*panta*)". Furthermore, emphasis is on the fact that the Spirit will "remind you of everything (*panta*) that I have said to you". This means that the Holy Spirit has the function of bringing something back to memory. John does not use the verb *mnêmoneuô*, which means "to remember", but the verb *ypomimneskô*, meaning to remind someone of something.¹⁷ According to 15:26, the Holy Spirit knows all things concerning Jesus ("he will be my witness"). In 16:13 the Holy Spirit grants the whole truth.

If we compare these passages with John 2:22, we see how the words pronounced by Jesus in the temple, according to the fourth Gospel (2:19), are object of a special deep reflection and knowledge within the Johannine group. This process of knowledge consists of three elements: a) *remembering*, that is recalling to memory Jesus' sayings; b) *making a comparison* between Jesus' words

17 See also Painter 2007, 238–245.

and the texts of the sacred Jewish scripture (“they believed in the scripture”); c) *being inspired* by the Holy Spirit (in fact, the disciples remember Jesus’ words after his resurrection when they have received the Holy Spirit (20:22)).

We repeat once again, Jesus’ words and deeds are elaborated through a complex procedure in which many things combine: (a) the revelation of the Holy Spirit (probably during a meeting of prayer or some form of ritual contact with the Spirit), (b) the remembering of Jesus’ words (perhaps presupposing a collection of words preserved in written or oral form), and, finally (c) a recall and comparison with the Jewish holy scriptures. Transmission, memory and revelation are deeply interwoven.

Our investigation brings us to the same conclusions of Painter’s (2007, 245):

The inspired memory of the Risen Lord has transformed [John’s] understanding. This transformation makes the identification of good historical tradition in John difficult [...]. In the quest of the historical Jesus, the remembered Jesus may not pass the test. Memory may stray widely from the subject it remembers, or it may develop understanding way beyond the scope of the remembered subject. For this reason, other criteria are needed in the historical task.

Ultimately, the writing of the Gospel was, for John, an act of prophetic creation, rather than the fruit of a simple remembrance of information transmitted by reliable witnesses.¹⁸ This does not exclude that the narrative of John can contain numerous re-tellings of oral materials relating to events and people. We believe that John was in possession of information in the normal sense of the word and that many historical data can be reconstructed through his narrative, in spite of the transformation they have undergone.

b. John’s project is not merely to remind Jesus’ words and deeds. He wants to re-establish and interpret them, in order to construct the founding memory of a group or assembly of specific people. The intent to give form to a collective aggregation of believers is connected to the purpose of delineating a specific religious project. John carefully selects words, events, situations, times and places to attain the “complete truth” (John 16:13). His purpose is to persuade a group or individuals to accept this truth and the consequences arising from

18 This Johannine way of remembering Jesus’ words could be explained by Halbwachs affirmation: “pour que les souvenirs de la vie du Christ et de sa mort, ainsi que des lieux qu’il avait traversés, fussent capables de durer, ils devaient être rattachés à une doctrine, c’est-à-dire à une idée qui vivait dans un group durable lui-même, et étendu” [...] “Ainsi, à mesure qu’on s’éloignait des événements, le dogme modifiait profondément l’histoire de Jésus” (1997, 125).

it. The people John addressed were obviously experiencing a singular moment of their history. They already possessed oral information about Jesus, as well as knowledge concerning places and persons. John's narration also seeks to found and define new experiences. It does not have the primary aim of returning to past memories or revisiting past experiences and practices that may be inevitably distant in time.

This means that John's passion narrative is anything but a pure repetition of a story memorized in an earlier time. In our view, it is based on a selection of themes and elements that John drew from his environment, which—to some extent—might have originated from earlier lines of transmission. His choice was determined by a strategy of communication. The religious proposal that he pursued through the writing of his text was determined by the prophetic-pneumatic reinterpretation that he made of the elements that he aimed to re-propose. Symptomatically, John assumed the task of providing—also through polemics—a “true” reconstruction. His process of memorization has a theological character. His aim is to sustain a belief.¹⁹

8 What does Memory Mean for Mark?

In Mark there is no explicit theory²⁰ of memory parallel to that worked out by John. Two passages, however, seem to show that Mark's attention was particularly devoted to Jesus' words: 8:18 (“Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember?”) and 14:72. In this latter text the only source of memory explicitly quoted by Mark is the person of Peter:

Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, ‘Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times’ (14:72).

We must underline that John appeals to the presence of a second and major “eye witness” who guarantees the truth, the beloved disciple (John 18:15; 19:26; 19:35; 20:8; 21:24). The recognition of this difference casts a special light on

19 We do not face here the question of the historical reliability of John's Gospel. On this matter the bibliography is notoriously immense. See Anderson, 2006; Charlesworth 2010; Crossley 2011.

20 This does not exclude that Mark could reflect previous memories about Jesus. Sandra Hübenthal dedicates an important contribution to the “Markusevangelium as Erinnerungstext”. Her intention is to understand “neutestamentliche Texte als Externalisierungen kollektiver Gedächtnisse” (Hübenthal 2014, 156).

the two different lines of transmission. It suggests that Mark and John may be based on information on the passion events (transmitted independently for a long time). This specific difference poses questions as to the reliability of stabilized / formal memorization processes, present in the early groups of Jesus' followers, and again leads us to take into account the cultural productivity or symbolic capitalization of contradictions.

Mark appears not to be concerned with defending himself from charges of representing events without a sufficient basis of testimonies. John, conversely, seems to take in account this problem. In fact, the sudden solemn declaration of the truthfulness of the testimony of "he who saw" (19:35) (apparently alluding to the beloved disciple²¹) hints indirectly that John was aware of criticisms and objections. He probably knew that somebody was convinced that the accounts of his group were not founded on reliable witness. The precise indications introduced by John, however, could derive from actual information, rather than being the result of mere invention. This difference may be explained by the diverse functions that collective memory has in Johannine groups and in Mark (Halbwachs 2008, 128–129).

9 Collective Memories and Conflicts Among Groups

In order to understand the function of collective memory in the groups from which the information of Mark and John comes, we may also take into account social confrontations and conflicts as the general setting in which their collective memories emerged.

a. The Gospel of John seems to presuppose a history of interactions between different tendencies in the Johannine circles and probably also confrontation among texts. We should imagine that the interactions between Johannine circles means the coexistence of multiple groups of followers in the same city, in the midst of diversified religious groups (Lampe 2003; Koester 1995; Destro – Pesce 2005; Friesen 2005, 2010; Trebilco 2013). Generally speaking, it is evident that the more complex are interchanges among groups, the more likely are controversies, conflicts, disputes, and the more frequent are differences in collective memories (Cavalli 2007; Jedlowski 2007; Grande 2007).

The fact is that it is difficult to reconstruct the history of confrontations and struggles among Johannine circles (Anderson 2007, 32–37). It is in any case clear that at least the splitting, witnessed by 1 John 2:18–27, presupposes

21 "Der entscheidende Zeuge niemand anders ist als der Lieblingsjünger. Er war einer der Personen, die am Kreuz standen" (Zumstein 2016, 732–733).

relevant differentiation of collective memories among (and inside) Johannine groups.²²

b. The polemical attitude, in general, is an index of social complexity. In other words, it can be assumed that polemical memories and/or disputes arise in the presence of a fragmented and differentiated social construction (punctuated by groups on the rise and/or in a state of distress). In this regard, it can be supposed that since John's narration of Jesus' final hours is in some points polemical against Mark, his account was conceived where the Johannine group was probably a minority closely cohabiting with other groups, who were perhaps equally polemical. It can probably be conceived as an "active minority" (Jedlowski 2007, 38; Grande 2007) and not merely a distressed marginalized entity. In fact, a minority that tries to affirm its own collective memory among other groups, and in the context of a wider society, may be considered as consciously engaged in the development of its environment.

In other words, the polemical tone of John was a symptom of a series of problems of various kinds. The history of the Johannine group actually passed through several periods of crisis and struggles,²³ including a tragic expulsion from the synagogues (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2) and the experience of internal scission (1 John 2:18–27). We can suppose that the probably intense and extended disputes within the Johannine factions (to which the Gospel of Thomas was also linked) strongly impinged on the groups and their development.

c. In particular, memory elaboration in John is also the result of a group awaiting justice after Jesus' death. After the defeat of their leader, his horrible crucifixion, and after the expulsion from synagogues, the Johannine groups elaborate a passion narrative that might convince the powers of his time: Jewish and/or Roman authorities (see the foregrounding of Pilate's role in John). These groups tried to change the hostile attitude of Jews and Romans and to rehabilitate Jesus and his followers. In fact, victims sometimes develop "memorable memories", which are different from general or official ones (Siebert 2007; Todorov 1995) aiming to compensate their sufferings and unbearable defeat.

Therefore, John's polemical, combative tone may not be primarily targeted at Mark. It probably may also be a rhetorical strategy against a political and religious context, or particular parts of it.²⁴ This possibility brings John and

22 See also 3 John 9–10 (cf. Destro – Pesce 2003a). See Bernabé 2010, 308–322.

23 See the outline of crisis/conflict experiences in Anderson 2007, 32–37.

24 On the "socio-political perspective of John's trial narrative" before Pilate, see Skinner 2010, 94–103.

Mark closer in several respects. Both develop narrative strategies in order to arrive at the rehabilitation and reintegration of their group, on a renewed basis.

d. The fact that in Mark (14:50) the disciples abandon Jesus, means that they did not wish or were unable to continue the experience they had with him. Thus, Mark imagines an interruption. He is emphasizing the passage to another historical situation, perhaps a phase of defeat and dissolution of the group.

John, by contrast, states that Jesus himself asks his arresters to permit his disciples “to go”. The disciples, no doubt, may have dispersed, or they may have re-assembled to form a new group, a new type of aggregation. What the Gospel’s author had in mind can probably be guessed from the story of Mary Magdalene. Finding the tomb empty (John 20:1–2) she runs to inform Peter and the beloved disciple. It would seem that John envisages a dispersion of all the disciples, except these two. However, the disciples have re-assembled by the time of the first apparition in the closed room (Thomas is absent). Compared to Mark, John places far greater emphasis on the relational continuity between the disciples and Jesus. In John, the disciples do not run away and do not abandon their teacher. It was Jesus who helped them to go way, asking to let them free. The disciples thus acquire a more positive and central image.

e. While Mark presents Jesus as a dramatic personage who accepts the death willed by God, for John, Jesus is the victor. By the death on the cross he is “raised” and not simply reduced to a humiliated and condemned leader. Mark emphasizes the enormity of the tragedy. To Judas’ betrayal and Peter’s denial Mark adds the flight and abandonment of the disciples, and the impressive portent of the three-hour darkness—from the sixth to the ninth hour (Mark 15:33)—while Jesus is on the cross. It is the enormous effect of the event that moves the centurion to exclaim “this man truly was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39).

In brief, Mark and John seek the same goals of rehabilitation (after degradation), but with different stories and conceptual frameworks. Despite their many similarities, they inevitably produce “collective memories” that are not convergent.

10 A Brief Closure

The confrontation between Mark and John suggests that behind the two passion narratives there were many independent and sometimes divergent and contrasting lines of transmission. At the origin of theses transmissions there were groups of Jesus’ followers situated in different places. An analysis of the

early processes of memorization leads to recognize (a) the existence of a differentiation of memories among groups that took place in the initial moment and that was followed only in a second phase by (b) a successive formation of a collective memory inside each group.

It is important to repeat that probably there were no groups or persons who received comprehensive or complete information about Jesus.²⁵ Everyone had partial information coming from many communicators and transmitters. The considerations made for Mark and John are heading in this direction. This means that the transmission and the memorization processes themselves create and disseminate divergent information. Because of their undeniable variability, their local origins and their partiality or fragmentation, all talks, reports or accounts were more or less uncontrolled and largely mutable.

The existence of conflicts between the early groups of Jesus' followers makes it inadequate the use of theories of presumed faithful memory processes to explain the differences in gospels narratives. We have not to forget that written texts are not simply links of an uninterrupted chain or process of memorization. They are point of depart of new interpretations and of new processes of cultural accumulation. They affirm and divulgate a particular interpretation in a context characterized by different positions and contrasting opinions. In the measure in which a text is received by a large consensus it can be at the origin of a new collective memory for those who accept it.

Appendix 1

Distinctive Elements of Mark's Passion Narrative

1. 14:27–28 General interpretation of the events: And Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."
2. 14:27–31 Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial
3. 14:32b–42 Prayer in the Gethsemane
4. 14:44–45 Judas' kiss
5. 14:48–49 "You arrest me as though I were a bandit"
6. 14:49b The event as fulfillment of the Scriptures
7. 14:51–52 The naked young
8. 14:53 Jesus before High Priests, elders, scribes

25 Against Bauckham, 2006, Chapter 6, "Eyewitnesses 'from the Beginning'".

9. 14:55–65 Process before the Sanhedrin with the answer of Jesus about the messiah and the son of man
10. 15:1 Second gathering of the Sanhedrin in the early morning
11. 15:13–14 Twice “Crucify him!”
12. 15:21 Simon of Cyrene carries the cross
13. 15:23 Wine mixed with myrrh is offered to Jesus
14. 15:25 Third hour: Jesus is crucified
15. 15:29–31 Jesus insulted by people walking by and by High Priests and Scribes
16. 15:33 Three hours of darkness: from sixth to ninth hour
17. 15:34–35 Sixth hour: Jesus cries “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?”
18. 15:37 Second cry of Jesus
19. 15:38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two
20. 15:39 The centurion and his declaration
21. 15:40–41 Many women looking on from a distance
22. 15:44–45 Pilate sends the centurion to verify Jesus’ death before giving his body to Joseph
23. 15:46a Jesus’ tomb in the rock
24. 15:46b Joseph of Arimathea rolls a stone against the door of the tomb
25. 15:47 Two Marys (Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus) see where the body was laid
26. 16:1 Two Marys (Mary Magdalene, and Mary of James) and Salome buy oil for Jesus’ body
27. 16:2 Two Marys (Mary Magdalene, and Mary of James) and Salome and not only Mary of Magdala go to the tomb
28. 16:5 Mary Magdalene, Mary of James and Salome see a young man in the tomb
29. 16:6–7 The young man informs the women about the resurrection and tells them: Jesus is “going ahead of you to Galilee”
30. 16:8 Flight and silence of the women

Appendix 2

Distinctive Elements of John Passion’s Narrative

1. 18:2 Judas knows the place of the garden
2. 18:3 Judas takes the cohort
3. 18:4–9 Jesus comes forward and asks two times “Whom are you looking for?”; the soldiers fall to the ground after the first question; Jesus says: “let these men go”
4. 18:10–11 The names of Peter and Malchos; Jesus says to Peter: “Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

5. 18:12 Presence of the *chiliarchos*
6. 18:13 Jesus brought to Annas
7. 18:15b–16 Presence of the beloved disciple with Peter; the beloved disciple enables Peter to enter in the courtyard
8. 18:1–23 The High Priest asks Jesus about his doctrines and disciples
9. 18:24 Annas sends Jesus to Caiaphas
10. 18:28b The Jews do not want to enter in the Pretorium for purity questions
11. 18:29–1:15 Pilate goes out four times in order to speak with the Jews and re-enters twice in the Pretorium in order to speak with Jesus
12. 19:16 Pilate gives Jesus to the Jews and High Priests for the crucifixion (see 19:5)
13. 19:19–22 The inscription of the cross specifies that Jesus is *nazaraïos*; the inscription in three languages; protest of the High Priests about the inscription
14. 19:23 Jesus' clothes divided into four parts but not the tunic; fulfillment of the Scriptures
15. 19:25–27 Three Marys and the beloved disciple at the cross; Jesus speaks to the mother and to the beloved disciple
16. 19:28 Jesus says: "I am thirsty"; fulfillment of the Scriptures
17. 19:30 Jesus says "It is finished."
18. 19:31–37 The legs of the crucified men broken; the soldiers pierced Jesus side with a spear; the Scriptures are fulfilled
19. 19:39 Participation of Nicodemus to the deposition of Jesus body
20. 19:40 Jesus' body is anointed
21. 19:41 A new tomb in the garden
22. 20:2 Mary of Magdala runs to Simon Peter and to the beloved disciple
23. 20:3–10 Simon Peter and the beloved disciple at the tomb

Appendix 3

Common Elements in the Passion Narratives of Mark and John

1. Jesus and his disciples go out of the house of last supper and go to the garden/Gethsemane
2. Jesus arrested
3. Armed reaction of a disciple
4. Disciples leave Jesus alone
5. Peter follows Jesus, enters in the courtyard of the High Priest, and warms himself at the fire
6. Peter's denial
7. Some questions posed by the High Priest to Jesus

8. Jesus delivered to Pilate
9. Pilate asks Jesus "Are you the King of the Jews?"
10. Jesus' answer: "You say"
11. Since there is the use to liberate a prisoner at Pesach, Pilate offers the liberation of Jesus, but Jewish authorities /*hoi Ioudaioi*/ the crowd prefer Barabbas
12. Jewish authorities / the crowd ask Jesus's crucifixion
13. Pilate orders Jesus' flogging
14. Thorns crown, purple cloak, "Hail, King of the Jews!"
15. Jesus goes to the Golgotha with the cross (carried by Simon of Cyrene or, conversely, by Jesus himself)
16. Jesus crucified among two others
17. The inscription "king of the Jews" on the cross
18. Soldiers divide Jesus' clothes
19. Presence of women near or at a certain distance
20. Jesus speaks twice on the cross, but in very different ways
21. Sour wine given to Jesus
22. Jesus death
23. Joseph of Arimathea asks Pilate for Jesus' body
24. Joseph of Arimathea wraps the body in cloth/clothes (*syndoni/othonois*)
25. Joseph of Arimathea lays Jesus in a tomb
26. After Shabbat Mary of Magdala/and other women goes/go to the tomb and finds/find it empty

A Persecuted and Antagonistic Minority: The Strategy of Matthew

1 The Advent of God's Final Kingdom (Matthew 1–3)¹

As is well known, “in any narrative the opening and introductory material is of central importance in setting the direction and tone” of all the work (Byrne 2002, 58). In the analysis of Matthew 1–2 our aim is to highlight the cultural frames that characterize the composition of the whole Gospel of Matthew. Exegesis of the text, analysis of pre-gospel transmission² and the reconstruction of the Jewish and Hellenistic context, are subordinated to this aim.

Chapters 1 and 2 of Matthew³ are underpinned by two fundamental convictions. Firstly, that Jesus is the Messiah (Matthew 1:1, 16, 17), and “king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2) descended from David (Matthew 1:1) and born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1). Secondly, that his birth marks the beginning of the future kingdom of God. Jesus’ birth is the fulfillment of the story begun with Abraham, who now truly becomes the father of many peoples and the owner of lands (Gen 17:5; 18:18). The advent of the kingdom and the birth of the king are also made manifest by a celestial event (the star seen by the Magi). It signals a decisive turning point in the history of Israel and of all peoples.

There is a general consensus concerning the thesis that the kingship of Jesus is a central theme of Matthew 1–2 (D.R. Bauer 1995; Nolan 1979; Norelli 2011, 62–64). It is our belief, however, that Matthew is also crucially concerned with

1 This chapter is a revision of our article: “The Cultural Structure of the Infancy Narrative in the Gospel of Matthew” (Destro – Pesce, 2011c). A draft of the paper was presented at the Geneva Conference (5–6 November 2010) organized by C. Clivaz, A. Dettwiler, L. Devillers, E. Norelli, and also at the Theological Faculty of the Loyola University of Chicago (16 November 2010) in a seminar directed by Edmondo Lupieri. We would like to thank Jean-Daniel Kaestli, Claire Clivaz, Edmondo Lupieri, Brian Dennert for their observations.

2 On the relation between the Gospel of Matthew and the *Ascension of Isaiah* see Norelli, 1994, 115–166. The book of P. Barthel – G. van Kooten (eds), *The Star of Bethlehem and the Magi: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Experts on the Ancient Near East, the Greco-Roman World, and Modern Astronomy*, Leiden, Brill, 2015 was published after the final redaction of our book.

3 For a bibliography, see R.E. Brown 1993; Paul 1984; Segalla 1987; Perrot 1976; for a bibliography concerning the Matthean genealogy, see: Nolland 1997.

the coming of the kingdom of God, without which the kingship of Jesus would have no meaning.

The infancy narratives (the birth in Bethlehem, the adoration of the Magi, the opposition of Herod and of “all Jerusalem,”⁴ the massacre of the innocents, the flight into Egypt and the return to the land of Israel) must not be viewed in isolation from the genealogy that precedes them or from the baptism performed by John the Baptizer that follows (R.E. Brown 1993, 48–50; Evans 2006, 61–72). The story of the baptism begins with the kingdom proclaimed as imminent by John (3:2). Through the theme of the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven, the chapter 3 of Matthew constitutes the link between the first two chapters and the rest of the Gospel.

The structural relationship between the first two chapters and the remainder of the Gospel is evident above all in the concluding sentence of the Gospel (28:18–20), which represents a form of inclusion with respect to them.⁵ From the very outset, the genealogy (through which Abraham becomes, via Jesus’ kingship, the father of peoples and owner of lands) and the revelation to the non-Jewish magi⁶ prefigure what takes place in the final sentence of the Gospel. In this sentence Jesus claims to have authority in heaven and on earth and orders the Eleven to preach to all nations (28:18–20). Non-Jews also can now become sons of Abraham, as announced by the Baptizer at the beginning (3:9).

In our opinion, it is crucial to understand that the Kingdom of Heaven spoken of in Matthew is the kingdom of Daniel 2:44: “the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall this kingdom be left to another people”. In 7:13–14 Daniel affirms:

I saw one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven [...] To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

Such dominion consists of the kingdom of Israel or of the Jews, which follows the “fourth kingdom” of the Gentiles (Dan 2:40; 7:23), and is the final kingdom

4 Matthew 2:3.

5 On the overall structure of Matthew, see: Bacon 1930; Kingsbury 1975; D.R. Bauer 1988; C.R. Smith 1997, 540–541.

6 Sim 1999. We agree with criticisms of Sim’s view that the Magi must be Jews: Byrne 2002, 60–61.

of history.⁷ The concluding sentence of the Gospel (28:18–20) must be set within the context of the expectation regarding God's final kingdom. Matthew, however, is writing when the kingdom has not yet arrived. Jesus is the Messiah and king, but he has been killed. His resurrection guarantees his victory and the beginning of the conversion of the Gentiles, which is crucial to the advent of the kingdom of the God of Israel over all peoples.⁸

The *ekklêsia* pre-announced by Jesus ("I will build my *ekklêsia*", 16:18) exists at the time of the writing of the Gospel, but it constitutes a minority, persecuted by the Jewish authorities.⁹ Matthew lives in a situation of difficulty, in which his group is working for the conversion of the Gentiles and awaiting the coming of God's final kingdom. We cannot deal here with the question of whether the extension to the Gentiles of the imminent kingdom represents a transformation or a creative discontinuity in comparison with the historical message of Jesus addressed only to the Jews.

Within the perspective of this minority it is essential, for Matthew, to calculate times and to know exactly in which period (preceding the coming of the final kingdom) he finds himself. For him, it is essential to refer to a pre-determined temporal scheme in which he can position his own situation. A scheme of the overall history and the calculation of times are both central elements of the first two chapters. The calculation of 42 generations (1:17), the birth of the king (2:2), the appearance of the star (2:2), the coming of the Baptizer (3:1), are four elements on which Matthew focuses in reckoning the time of the final kingdom. As we shall see, the themes of persecution, fatal hostility, flight, and opposition by Jewish and political authorities, are also major issues that the first two chapters have in common with the entire Gospel.¹⁰

The literary genre of the infancy stories in Matthew has been the subject of extensive discussion.¹¹ Here, we merely emphasize that the aim of the author was to narrate events that he believed had actually occurred (1:22) (Varner

7 The scheme of the four kingdoms is also present in the Fourth Sibylline Oracle. See Collins 1990, 254.

8 The pilgrimage and the conversion of all nations in Jerusalem is present in many prophetic texts (Isa 60:1–22; 2:3–4; 25:6–9; 49:22–26; 51:4–5; 55:4–5; 56:3–8; 66:18–22; Zech 8:20–23).

9 See, for example, R.E. Brown 1993, 45–48.

10 For example, the attempt by Herod to kill Jesus prefigures the killing of the Baptizer, the decision of "all the people" against Jesus in 27:25, the killing of Jesus and the persecution of the disciples after Jesus' death.

11 Gnllka 1986, 60–62; Viviano 1990; Treballe Barrera 1992; Varner 2007; Guijarro 2009, 301–302.

2007, 22). Recourse to the Bible is important, but the overall structure of the story is not that of a *midrash*.¹²

2 The Cultural Politics of Matthew. The Genealogy as the Legitimation of a King and His Kingdom

We must investigate the religious construction or system that Matthew elaborates in the first three chapters. Matthew does not want merely to narrate facts using, with varying degrees of explicitness, some traditional frames of his environment. He adapts all the cultural elements that he draws upon with the aim to create a religious proposal, which he wishes to present as the legitimation of the groups of Jesus' followers he addresses. Matthew intends to construct something that we can call a consistent organization of the life of a group endowed with distinctive religious objectives and characteristics.

Certainly, an author is not always fully aware of the cultural operations that are taking place or emerging in her/his text. Matthew does not explicitly establish criteria for the legitimacy of his instruments or conceptual frames. He adopts them insofar as they are already legitimated and implemented in his environment.

(a) Our aim is to describe some cultural frames present in the Gospel, in order to understand the distinctive religious system of Matthew. In our view, the cultural elements present in the first three chapters of Matthew concern: 1) a genealogy as the foundation of a king and his kingdom; 2) a pre-determined succession of times and peoples; 3) a relation between the stars and the destiny of peoples; 4) revelations through dreams. Other models of behavior are also of great relevance. We focus on just two of them: fight as the total annihilation of the adversary, and flight as a mechanism of salvation.

Matthew lists a chain of men, descendants of Abraham (with the inclusion of some non-Jewish women). These men are introduced as fathers who procreate. Attention is focused on the continuity of the line of procreation and on its time's extent: the text deals with 42 generations. The connection to Abraham and biblical history points to the centrality of the ethnic Jewish background.

12 Four biblical citations are concentrated within one section (2:5–6; 2:15; 2:18; 2:23). However, they do not provide the structure according to which the narrative is organized. Also the genealogy has biblical contents, but is organized within a structure of discourse that does not come from the Bible. On the use of the Bible in Matthew 1–2, see R.E. Brown 1993, 110–116; 184–188; 219–225; 596–598; Pesch 1994; Menken 2005.

We briefly recall that in Luke, by contrast, the genealogy has not primarily an ethnic-Judaic function, since it goes back not to Abraham but to Adam.¹³

The genealogy of Matthew systematically underlines, through the continuous repetition of the formula “he begot”,¹⁴ the permanence of a link, the physical continuity of the generations descending from Abraham. In this way Jesus receive an ethnic-genealogical legitimacy. The birth of Jesus makes thus present in some way the physical dimension of Abraham, who ultimately appears as the father of the Messiah, the son of David.

This implicit cultural frame encapsulates the idea that any human body perpetuates and multiplies itself through acts of generation, coming to encompass many peoples and somehow also the lands in which they live. In this sense what is implicit is that Abraham embodies and aggregates not only peoples but also territories. It is through Jesus, the Messiah and Davidic king, that the body of Abraham also affirms a dominion over the land of Israel.¹⁵

(b) Matthew’s genealogy is divided into three sections emphasizing the importance of the kingly dominion of the Jewish people over their land. The first section concerns King David (the only one to be called “king” in 1:1–17), the second refers to the Babylonian deportation, underlining the disaster of exile and the subjection of the Jews to the rule of a foreign kingdom, while the third is related to the birth of the Messiah (“Jesus, who is called the Messiah”, 1:16), who restores the kingdom.

There is a certain agreement in recognizing that Matthew’s genealogy also has the aim of legitimizing the incorporation of the Gentiles. This latter intent becomes clear if Abraham is conceived as being the father of many peoples, according to the biblical promises, and as the father of proselytes, according to Judaic conceptions. The insertion in the genealogy of women of probable Gentile origin (Ruth is a Moabite, Tamar and Rahab are Canaanite, and Bathsheba perhaps a Hittite) is functional to this aim (A.J. Levine 1988, 59–88; Stowasser 2005, 183–196). The new kingdom, coming after the fourth kingdom of the Gentiles, may have the purpose of legitimizing the annexation of other peoples, through the preaching of Jesus’ disciples addressed to all nations (Matthew 28:18–20). They become part of Abraham’s legacy and God’s eternal kingdom.

13 Much more dissimilar is the beginning of the Gospel of John that does not present any genealogy and legitimates Jesus as Logos, and not in ethnic terms.

14 Matthew repeats 38 times “begot” (*egennēsen*), see Destro – Pesce 2011a, 131.

15 Destro 2010; Destro – Pesce, 2011a, 130–134. The centrality of the land in the genealogy is also defended by Runesson 2011, 308–316.

(c) Within this perspective, it seems important to understand the geographical collocation of Matthew, and to identify which Gentiles he had in mind. It appears plausible that the geographical setting of Matthew can be collocated in northeastern Syria,¹⁶ an area where, alongside the Gentile majority, a large number of Jews lived. This means that the imminent coming of the kingdom of Heaven was announced in a Syro-Hellenistic context.

In short, the cultural basis of the whole genealogy lies in the idea that generative body, *oikos* and land are inextricably associated. The body of the ancestor is linked to an *oikos*, which implies occupation of a territory and alliance with or subjugation of peoples that live in the same land. Thus, there cannot be royal legitimacy if the king is not linked by a genealogical line with the kings that are bound to the peoples and lands over which he wishes to reign. The kingdom of the Jews has legitimacy as far as the peoples that should be part of it can be included in the genealogical construction that justifies their admission or submission.

3 The Pre-Determined Succession of Times and Peoples

Matthew, as we have seen, divides the genealogy of Jesus into three series, each including 14 generations. The number cannot be accidental. The division into multiples of seven directly links the reckoning of times to the calculation of the weeks (of years) necessary to come to the end of times. Such reckonings are found elsewhere, for example, but not exclusively, in Dan 9:24–27, who in turn interprets Jer 25:11–12; 29:10 (Beckwith 2001, 260–275. 303–309). In this type of calculation, the number 42 implies a reference to the number 49.

Matthew states that Jesus is the “king of the Jews”, the son of “king David” and the Messiah, and places him in the 42nd generation. It means that this generation marked the beginning of the era of the last kingdom (prophesied by Dan 2:44; 7:13–14), which comes after the four kingdoms of Gentile kings. Matthew,

16 In Matthew 19:1 “beyond the Jordan” indicates the western part of the Jordan valley: the point of view of Matthew seems to be located east of the river. Matthew is the only Evangelist that affirms that “his fame spread throughout all Syria” (4:24). See Feldtkeller 1993, 17; Theissen 1989a, 263. The relationships of Ign. *Smyrn.* 1.1; *Phld.* 3.1; *Pol.* 11.3 with Matthew, and also the well-known Matthew’s relationship with the *Didache* and with the *Ascension of Isaiah* (see Theissen 1989a, 262; Visonà 2000; Pesce 2004a; Norelli 1994) converge on a Syrian origin of the Gospel. For Feldtkeller (1993, 17), its location was between Emesa, Kyrrhos and Hierapolis of Syria. See Norelli 2011. See R.E. Brown 1993, 43–47; Luz 2007, 46. See also Chapter 7 § 13 in this book.

therefore, implicitly refers to a period of 49 generations. In all probability, the Gospel alludes to a jubilee¹⁷ occurring in the final year that follows the “seven weeks of years” (Lev 25:8–10). E. Lupieri has already shown a link between the genealogy of Matthew and the idea of the final jubilee: “[...] along with being a triplet of 14, 42 also corresponds to six weeks of generations. [...] This means that we would have a jubilee of generations minus the last week”. The last week represents “the time left to the end of the world”.¹⁸ The notion expressed by Matthew of the seven generations remaining until the final kingdom seems similar not only to that of Dan 9:25 concerning the seven weeks, but may also correspond to the first seven-year period of the 10th jubilee (which marks the end of times) found at Qumran in 11QMelch 6–10: “That [will take place] in the first week of years of the jubilee that follows the nine jubilees”.¹⁹

Essentially, in Matthew, the temporal succession covers a time that goes from Abraham to the Messiah and to the future fulfillment of the kingdom in an overall number of 50 generations. Having placed Jesus in the 42nd generation,²⁰ Matthew possibly places himself in the 43rd, and envisages further seven generations before the definitive end of time. This allows him to assert that the kingdom has come in the sense that it has arisen, and that the messiah king has already come. He must, however, return once again after his death and resurrection. This temporal postponement confirms the certainty of the final coming of the kingdom and the crucial role of Jesus within it. It offers the possibility of extending Jesus’ task from a time in which his function is that of the remission of sins,²¹ to a future in which he is the judge.²²

17 The centrality of the jubilee model in Matthew is also attested in Matthew 6:12 and 18:23–35.

18 Lupieri 2005, 357–371. R.E. Brown 1993, 75, refuses the hypothesis of the seven weeks because Matthew speaks of three times 14 and not six times seven. Luz 2007, 85–86 admits that the calculation of time in fixed periods implies “the idea of the divine plan that lies over the history”; but “only in quite general terms [...] the apocalyptic parallels on the division of the history” should be “relevant for understanding our text”. What is important, however, is the idea of a fixed division of history in predetermined phases.

19 See C. Martone 1996, 253–254; Puech 1993, 524–526; Gianotto 1984a, 65–66.

20 Jesus’ generation is considered by Matthew as a “wicked generation” (12:39, 41, 42, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36; 24:34).

21 See Matthew 1:21 and the fact that Matthew 26:28 attributes the remission of sins to Jesus’ death, and not to John’s baptism, as in Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3. The fact that Jesus saves his people from their sins does not eliminate the idea of the kingdom of Heaven in history.

22 On the kingdom of Heaven as a future reality, see Matthew 4:8; 16, 19; 18:3–4; 19:23–24; 24:6–14, against W. Grimm 1984–1985.

The problem of when the future kingdom was to arrive preoccupied not only Matthew but also many, if not all, groups of early Jesus' followers. We come across it in the Acts of the Apostles (1:6–7), in Revelation, which envisages a sequence of events covering a long period of time (16:16; 19:6–8, 20:2–3; 20:7–10),²³ and in Mark 13:32.

The implicit frame of temporal succession is linked to the idea, shared by many ancient cultures, that there are predetermined times in the destinies of nations. This applies to the nation of Abraham in particular. The scheme of a series of more or less universal kingdoms, alternately upheld by different peoples is also encountered in Roman historiography, probably inherited from Middle Eastern environments (Collins 1990, 254; Swain 1940, 330–337). This cultural frame openly encompasses a reckoning of the times of the rise, ascent, and decline of nations. It is part of a reflection on future expectations and on the time of their fulfillment. In other word the group of Jesus' followers experiences a minority situation, maintaining nonetheless the hope of later victory and dominion. The ideology of the group is not attenuated by the fact that its members are living in a situation of uncertainty. The hope of a kingly dominion is merely deferred to a time to come. This is an attitude not unlike that of the book of Daniel, according to the interpretation of J.J. Collins. Referring to the reflection on the delay of the kingdom in Daniel (9:24–25), Collins wrote: "the author tones down the revolutionary implications of the four kingdom schema by placing it in a context where its fulfillment does not appear imminent [...] The deferral of eschatological hope is part of a strategy for maintaining Jewish life in a Gentile environment" (Collins 1990, 257).

4 A Central Frame. Stars and the Destiny of Peoples

The birth of Jesus²⁴ takes place in Bethlehem. This fact is considered as proof that Jesus is the Davidic king (Matthew 2:5). Therefore, his birth in some way coincides with or alludes to the beginning of his kingdom.²⁵

W. Stegemann rightly maintains that the stories reported in Matthew 1–2 show "the insertion of Jesus into the history of Israel", in opposition to U. Luz who affirms that "the story of Jesus narrated by Matthew must substitute the

23 See Lupieri 1999, 309–310, 314–321 and also 296–298.

24 "Genesis" in Matthew 1:1 and 1:18 seems to signify *origin* better than *birth*, see Kingsbury 1975, 155–157.

25 Against Kingsbury 1975, 164–165, who places too much emphasis on the disciples and the Church.

founding history of Israel" (W. Stegemann 2010, 45. 47–48). The link between the story of Jesus recounted in Matthew 3–28 and the story of Israel lies in the concept that the kingdom of God brought by Jesus is one and the same as the kingdom of Israel.

Matthew claims that the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem on the joint basis of two biblical texts: Mic 5:1–4 and 2 Sam 5:2. The use of 2 Sam 5:2 (*su poimaneis ton laon mou ton Israêl kai su esei eis êgoumenos epi ton Israêl*) is of crucial importance since it strengthens and confirms, on a biblical basis, Matthew's idea that Jesus is a Davidic king. In fact, 2 Sam reported the divine declaration that David will be king of Israel (*kai eipen kurios pros se su poimaneis ton laon mou ton Israêl kai su esei eis êgoumenos epi ton Israêl*). At the same time, it shows that Jesus was born king while Herod was still on the throne. This is also the case of David, who is declared as king while Saul is still sovereign (*ontos Saul basileôs ef'êmin*). Hence, the parallel between the two persecuted kings, Jesus and David, is further accentuated. As Saul sought to kill David, so Herod would seek in vain to kill Jesus. The text of Micah serves not only to indicate Bethlehem as the Messiah's birthplace, but also to foretell Israel's dominion over all peoples (Mic 5:7–9).

Matthew then recounts that the Magi²⁶ had seen the star of "the king of the Jews". Having first set Jesus within a Jewish cultural framework (a genealogy in the context of biblical history), the terms of reference are now broadened. For Matthew, it is essential to bring together two independent sources of revelation, the Bible, on the one hand, and astrological revelation, on the other. The convergence of the two sources is crucial to his line of discourse, which sets out to show how Gentiles, and not only the Jews, are the addressees of Jesus' mission.

It is impossible to understand the Matthean text without knowledge of astrology in the cultures of the first century CE (Ramsey and Licht 1997; Kotansky 2007). The Greek expression "from the east" (*ep'anatolôn*) in the plural indicates not a generic east, but plausibly Mesopotamia.²⁷ Thus, Matthew's vision seems to envisage Persian wise men. The Magi were interpreters of dreams and astrologists.²⁸ Their religious wisdom permitted them to discover,

26 Boll 1917, 44–45; Powell 200a, 2000b; Gerber 2007.

27 Num 23:7: "Balak sent for me out of Mesopotamia, from the mountains of the east (*ex oreôn apo anatolôn*)" (See e.g. Philo, *Conf* 65). *Anatolai* in the plural means "east" as in Philo *Leg* 1.43; 1.46.

28 "The order of Magi was well known in Greco-Roman antiquity. In Book 1 of the *Histories* Herodotus refers to Magi as originally members of the priestly caste of the Medes and Persians who possessed special power to interpret dreams. During the Hellenistic period,

through the observation of celestial bodies, the rising²⁹ of the star that marked the birth of the king of the Jews. Through revelation and astrological knowledge, they learned of the beginning of the final kingdom that would follow the kingdoms of the Gentiles.

The episode of the Magi constitutes a sort of counter-history to the one narrated in Dan 2. The advent of the fifth eternal kingdom was revealed in a dream to Nebuchadnezzar, but the Magi were unable to understand the revelation (Dan 2:12), while Daniel, the Israelite, understood it thanks to a revelation that he received during the night (2:19). According to Matthew, the Magi (heirs of those Magi who could not interpret the dream of Nebuchadnezzar), and not the theologians of Jerusalem, understand that the fifth kingdom announced in Daniel is now coming. They know of the coming of the kingdom of Israel because they connect the rising of the star with the birth of the future king. Like Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2:46–47 who “fell on his face” (*proskynêse*) and said “Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery!”, the Magi also perform a *proskynesis* of homage that prefigures the submission and worship of all peoples to the king of Israel. R.H. Gundry (1994, 26–27) has shown that Matthew draws upon Theodotion’s version of Daniel, which, in contrast to the other Greek translations, places strong emphasis on several chapters of Daniel concerning the presence of Magi.³⁰ Paul, too, in 1 Cor 14:23–25, has in mind the act of worship performed by Nebuchadnezzar of Dan 2:46, when speaking of the Gentiles who perform a *proskynesis* in recognition that God is present in the *ekklêsia* (Pesce 1985a).

the Magi developed a reputation as learned practitioners of magic and of various types of divination, especially astrology; as such, they were esteemed or condemned according to the various views of such practices held by Greco-Roman writers” (Hegedus 2003, 82–83). See also Beck 1991.

- 29 “‘Rising’ means the star’s heliacal rising, i.e. the first time in the year that it was visible rising ahead of the sun before dawn. The usual technical term for this was ἐπιτολή, but ἀνατολή could be used for the heliacal rising as well; the latter seems to be the case in Matthew 2:2. According to the narrative, the heliacal ‘rising’ of the star held significance for the Magi as an astrological omen. It was this more ancient form of astrology, rather than horoscopic astrology, in which the Magi were engaged”, (Hegedus 2003, 83). See also Hegedus 2007.
- 30 Furthermore, Theodotion’s version is the only translation of Dan 9:25 that speaks of the *christos* as *égoumenos* (*christou égoumenou*) after the seven weeks (see the term *égoumenos* in Matthew 2:6). Ziegler (ed), 1999, 25. See Van der Woude (ed.), 1993; Dimant 1993; Duquaker 1993; Kratz 1993.

In the Roman-Hellenistic age, along with a widespread cultural frame that each man (F. Schmidt 1997) had a star that indicated his destiny, there existed a theory that each nation³¹ had a star that reflected the birth, development and decline of its power over other peoples.³² The Magi see the star during its “rising” (*en anatolé*), that is, in the initial phase of its appearance. Thus, we may say that the kingdom of the Jews is only at its very beginning. The star of the Magi is in fact “the star of the king of Jews”, not of Jesus as an individual, implying therefore the rise of the kingdom of Israel.³³ This was the belief of Matthew, who shows the Magi going first to Jerusalem to see king Herod, and who shows Herod’s concern for his reign and for the political implications of the birth of the new king. The basic cultural meaning of the passage is that, since the Gentile Magi have had a revelation of the imminent rise of the final kingdom of Israel, they have come to perform the act of submission on behalf of non-Jewish peoples.³⁴

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- 31 Luz 2007, 105 disregards the political meaning of the star. At Qumran in the first century BCE (4Q318; see also 4Q186; 4Q534; 4Q561) there is evidence of astrology in relation not only to the personal destiny of single persons but also in relation to the collective life of a people or a town, see Bar Ilan 2004, 2032. The practice of astrology on the part of Jews as evidenced in a variety of ancient texts shows that Matthew could come from a Jewish environment in which astrology was common. See Sim 1999; Charlesworth 1987. See also Greenfield and Sokoloff 1995.
- 32 Molnar 2003, 325–327 maintains that “several sources on Hellenistic astrology that assign zodiacal signs to countries (chorography) can be used to determine the sign of Judea”. Following T. Hegedus, Molnar (1999, 27–28, 42–48) rightly points out that Greco-Roman astrologers, such as Ptolemy and Vettius Valens, held Aries to be the sign of Syria and Judea. Molnar also argues persuasively that Matthew does not refer to a celestial phenomenon that was astronomically impressive, but rather to a sign whose significance was primarily astrological. Against the supposition of Molnar “that the most likely horoscope in which professional astrologers such as the Magi would have been interested was the appearance of the Sun, Moon, Jupiter and Saturn (all regal signs) in Aries on April 17, 6 BCE”, Hegedus maintains that “the star of Matthew 2:1–12 derives from the common, widespread belief (found already in Plato [*Timaeus* 41D–E]) that all people have a ‘natal star’ that appears at their birth and passes away with them” (Hegedus 2003, 84). In conclusion, Matthew believed that the beginning of the last kingdom was astrologically manifested. See Manilius, *Astronomica* 4, 744–752; see also Panaino 2004.
- 33 Is not therefore the personal star of the Messiah, but the star of the people of Israel and of the beginning of his kingdom (see also Goodenough 1958, 175: “Identification of the star with the Messiah, however, is one of those specific interpretations which I consider so dangerous that I rarely indulge in them”).
- 34 Matthew 2.2 “we have seen his star” is often connected with Num 24:17 LXX “a star shall come out of Jacob”. We are not, however, primarily interested in the pre-Matthean tradition or in the Jewish background, but rather in the cultural frames of the infancy

The origin of the astrological model present in Matthew probably comes from ideologies and speculations on kingly enthronement and legitimacy. The overall frame is not only contained in literary sources, but may be identified in particular places and monuments. In this regard, we must note that an important model, perhaps influencing the entire passage (from the start of the genealogy to the star of the Magi and their subsequent worship), can also be found at the great monumental complex of Mount Nemrud, where in 62 BCE. Antiochos I (son of Mithridates I Kallinikos), king of Commagene (70–31 BCE), built the *hierothesion* (housing his tomb). More importantly, the complex is the location of a series of worship spaces (including eastern and western terraces) containing representations of his political-religious power and the astronomical-astrological sanction of it.³⁵ His royal power was represented as the genealogical convergence of all the peoples living in his domain and as the religious convergence of all their respective deities. The whole *hierothesion* complex was astronomically legitimated and, finally, sanctioned by worship and ritual practices. The western terrace of the Nemrud site contains the so-called horoscope of the lion (“the earliest known extant Greek calendrical horoscope [...] not an astrological combination”³⁶). It is not certain whether the celestial bodies represented in the relief refer to the date of consecration of the monumental structure, or to the birth or coronation of the sovereign.³⁷ Whatever the case may be, the astronomical-astrological sanction of the event (linked to the kingship of Antiochos I) is very clear.³⁸

The birthday of my natural body, the sixteenth of Audnaios, and the tenth of Loos, the day of my accession to the throne, I have consecrated to the manifestation of the great deities, who were my guides in a prosperous beginning and have been the source of universal blessing for my whole kingdom.³⁹

narrative. See R.E. Brown 1993, 190–196; Dorival 1999. 1996 Following Dorival, the denial of the reference to Numbers “aboutit à démesianiser la péricope de Matthieu et aller contre la logique interne du texte” (1999, 108). See also, Ricoux 1999.

35 D.H. Sanders 1996. The cultural programme of Antiochos I is well represented in Waldmann 1973, 205–215. See also, Jacobs 1997. 2000.

36 D.H. Sanders (1996, 89–90, 416). See Heilen, 2005.

37 The *nomos* inscription at lines 101–103 speaks of the celebration of “my birth and my accession to the throne”, D.H. Sanders 1996, 210; see also 89–90.

38 It should be borne in mind that the reign of Mithridates VI Eupator had also been announced by a star. Kotansky 2007, 388–389.

39 D.H. Sanders 1996, 214.

The eastern terrace, by contrast, reveals a ritual organization of space, which represents: a) the genealogical-political origin of Antiochos I, through a series of statues of past kings: to the left are the statues of the 15 Persian ancestors (from Darius I the Great to Mithradates I Kallinikos); to the right, those of the 17 Macedonian ones (from Alexander the Great to Mithradates I of Commagene); b) the deification of Antiochos, whose statue is situated among gigantic statues of gods,⁴⁰ represented in order to unify the religious conceptions of the diverse peoples; c) the organization of the worship: an altar is situated in front of the gods, to the left and right of which are represented the royal lines that converge in Antiochos.

The cultural frame expressed in a topographical and ritual way in the *hierothesion* of Mount Nemrud, is expressed in a literary and narrative way in Matthew 1–2. The two chapters of the Gospel provide a genealogical and astronomical representation of the birth of the messiah-king. The worship of the king and his deities that has to be performed at the altar on the eastern terrace corresponds, in the Matthew's narrative, to the *proskynesis* of the Magi. All peoples are thought to assemble within a single new kingdom, at a predetermined date, which is manifested by celestial events. On this date a ritual must be performed in which all these elements are brought together. The Nemrud ritual, which is both religious and political, takes the form of an authentic worship and is located in the highly celebrated place of the *hierothesion*.⁴¹ We must add that in Ancient Near East, for example in Assyria, the kingly power was commonly legitimated through an ideology in which genealogical mechanisms⁴² together with astrological revelations played an important role. At Nemrud, on the back of the monumental statues of kings and gods, a great Greek inscription declares the politico-religious ideology of Antiochos.⁴³

40 The first colossus represents Artagnes-Heracles-Ares; the second, Apollo-Mithras-Helios-Hermes; the third, Zeus-Oromasdes; the fourth, the goddess Tyche-Commagene; the fifth, Antiochus I of Commagene: see D.H. Sanders 1996, 182–193.

41 The idea that the a star could lead the way to the exact place where a person was, was not absent from ancient astrological speculations. Kotansky (2007, 421) points out that in “the so-called ‘Torch of Timoleon’ (Ramsey, *Descriptive Catalogue*, Object 6, pp. 68–70), a fiery *lampas* (Diod. Sic. 16, 66, 1, 3) [is] said to ‘lead the way (*proêgeito*) for the Corinthian commander as he sailed from Corcyra to Metapontum in 344 BCE”. See also Viviano 1996.

42 In Pongratz and Leisten (1997, 84–100) see the paragraphs on: “Die Bedeutung der Filiation für einen berechtigten Anspruch auf die Thronnachfolge” and “Das Königtum als ewige Institution und die Bedeutung des Dynastie-Gedankens. See also Marchetti 2008.

43 D.H. Sanders 1996, vol. 1.206–217; vol. 11, 113–131. See also Waldmann 1973, 205–215; Spieckermann 2010.

5 Revelations in Dreams

The dream as a vehicle of revelation and supernatural messages is a way to give impulse to human actions. In some parts of Matthew's narrative, dreams represent a way of contact with the supernatural. They have the function of explaining to specific people what they have to do. From 1:20 to 2:22 five revelatory dreams are narrated: four concern Joseph (1:20; 2:13; 2:19; 2:22) and one the Magi (2:12). They represent the entrance of the supernatural into the human world. With them, from the first two chapters, Matthew gives a particular tone to his Gospel because he tells the story of people who are guided by supreme forces. He employs dreams and astrological revelations to show the inevitability of the historical events. The revelatory dream is one of the strongest bases for the construction of his entire religious discourse. It is much more than a mere tool of legitimacy.

The two initial chapters present three elements that confer certainty and divine sanction on the narrated events. They are the Jewish Scriptures, the astrological revelation and the revelatory dreams. The entire vision of Matthew is dependent on this ensemble of elements, which constitutes a culturally credible frame within Matthew's environment.

Interestingly, references to the Judaic scriptures are found throughout Matthew's Gospel, while the mechanism of the dream is used only in this section (except for 27:19 when Pilate's wife has a dream that prompts him to refrain from taking decisions concerning Jesus). Also revelations connected to the appearance of celestial bodies are absent from the rest of the Gospel. Since the two initial chapters are largely a creation of Matthew,⁴⁴ and are of strategic importance to the rest of the Gospel, it is plausible that they provide important clues for reconstructing Matthew's way of thinking and that of the environment he addressed.

6 Flight and Fight. Fight as the Total Annihilation of the Adversary

As suggested by G. Simmel more than a century ago,⁴⁵ a struggle can have three different outcomes: victory and annihilation of the enemy; compromise;

44 Obviously a creation on the basis of reinterpreted and rewritten sources, see: J. Gnillka 1986, 1–62; R.E. Brown 1993, 69–70. 96–119. 177–188. 213–225. Nolland 1998; Masson 1982.

45 G. Simmel's article "Der Streit" was published in 1908 in his book *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*. An English translation of a previous redaction of the article was published in 1904 on the *American Journal of Sociology* (Simmel 1904).

reconciliation. Chapter 1 and 2 of Matthew seem to envisage that the relationship between enemies cannot, or must not, be resolved through compromise or with peaceful agreement, but must necessarily lead to the destruction of the adversary.⁴⁶ The evangelist does not contemplate battles in which winners and losers reach a balance or compensation, with the outcome equal to zero. It is this cultural scheme that underpins Herod's behavior towards the future king of the Jews. The massacre of the innocents demonstrates Matthew's sensitivity towards the tragic resolution of conflicts. It is a representation that brings into play people in situations of fear, political struggle and power strategies. Herod seeks the destruction of the future king. The massacre is proof of the hostility of Herod and the religious authorities of Jerusalem towards the coming of the fifth kingdom. In terms of implicit cultural schemes, it is a sign that Matthew shares the supposition that enmity requires the destruction of the adversary.

The fight to death against the king of the Jews is reinforced by Matthew in the scene of Jesus' condemnation to death in 27:25. In other words, the deadly combat leading to the killing of John the Baptizer first, and of Jesus later, is present from the outset. This cultural frame of the fight for the annihilation of the enemy is so interiorized in Matthew that he interprets the behavior of God himself in the same way. The parable of the wedding feast, in Matthew alone, contains a significant addition: God destroys the city (symbolizing Jerusalem) as a punishment for mistreating and murdering the king's messengers (Matthew 22:5–7). God behaves in a similar fashion at the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:46), where the only alternative is between eternal punishment and eternal life. Matthew appears to suppose a specific idea of human life, which he sees as being dominated by tragic events and an enmity driven by a relentless desire for destruction.

A first historical-exegetical analysis detects in the story of the slaughter of the children traces of biblical models: the persecution of Moses, or that of Israel by Balak, or Saul's persecution of David. Together with T. Hegedus, one may also refer to a more general historical model: "the story of Astyages (Herodotus, *Histories* 1.107ff.) a king (of the Medes) who consults Magi and then tries unsuccessfully to kill his prophesied successor, a male child (Cyrus) or the story of the visit of the Armenian king Tiridates and his entourage to Rome in 66 CE, told by Dio Cassius (*Roman History* 63.1–7) and Suetonius (*Life of Nero* 13)".⁴⁷

46 See also Lawrence 2003, 299.

47 Hegedus 2003, 85. We wish to thank Matteo Tubiana for his suggestion as to the similarities with Cronus swallowing his children, fearing that one of his sons would one day overthrow him, and with Zeus swallowing Metis following Prometheus' prophecy that Metis would bear a daughter whose son would overthrow him.

However, one must also seek out the implicit cultural pattern, the way of thinking that lies at the basis of Matthew's narrative, which we have defined as fight for the total annihilation of the adversary, a pattern that does not admit conciliatory mechanisms or compromises.

7 Flight as a Mechanism of Rescue

In Matthew's narrative the threat of death or total destruction is linked to a mechanism of flight.⁴⁸ The angel, for instance, orders Joseph to "flee" (*fuge*) into Egypt (2:13) in order to escape Herod's mortal threat.

The use of flight as an expedient of rescue is not an innovation of Matthew. Flights towards safety are numerous in the Bible. Jesus as fugitive is a fundamental theme also in other gospels. In John, for example, Jesus says on several occasions that he is fleeing from enemies who want to capture him (John 7:1; 8:59; 11:54, 57; 12:36). Mark 3:6–7, too, seems to suggest that Jesus retired to another place in order to flee from those who want to kill him (Destro – Pesce, 2011a, 37–38).

Another mention of the strategy of flight is present in Matthew in 2:22: "he was afraid (*efobêthê*) to go there". Jesus seems to flee from Judea to Galilee when John the Baptizer is arrested (4:12), and to avoid any risk by decamping when John is killed (14:13). It is the co-presence of these two factors (threat and flight) that clarifies the reality in which Jesus moves. Matthew seeks to stress from the start that Jesus' life is characterized by this dramatic double dimension.

Some scholars (A. -J. Levine 1988, 133–134; Byrne 2002, 62) have remarked the importance in Matthew of the flight motif. This motif is linked, for example, to the theme of fear (2:22), as in the case of Jesus' advice to "have no fear" (10:26, 28) in the face of persecution (10:23). Such advice also appears in Luke, although it is not given in connection to flight from persecution. For Matthew, however, escaping must be accompanied by courage in proclaiming a truth that inevitably provokes a strong reaction, a lethal hostility: "Do not fear those who kill the body" (10:26–28).

Flight is the saving mechanism of the powerless, of those who cannot fight on equal terms with those who wield power. It is the forceful, but non-aggressive weapon of the weak. It is evidently a means of neutralizing the oppression of those who rule.

48 See also, Matthew 24:16, "then those in Judea must flee to the mountains".

The adoption of the mechanism of flight does not primarily depend on the imitation of a biblical model. It is determined by the fact that the Matthean community is a persecuted minority group.⁴⁹ Within this mechanism, a clear strategic defensive scheme may emerge. A non-institutionalized group, without official recognition, claims to be in possession of a truth that is not known by the political and religious authorities (by which it is persecuted). This scheme seemingly constituted an answer to the great recurrent question of why the kingdom of God had not yet been established.

The fact that the bearers of Jesus' message are weak⁵⁰ and must recur to strategies of flight does not eliminate the fact that their message and actions constitute a radical challenge to the existing establishment, which is to be subverted⁵¹ and annihilated in the future kingdom. Matthew, in conclusion, presupposes that the majority group seeks without success to destroy a fragile minority, condemning itself to future punishment. Flight is therefore a strategy inspired by God. It is a device of divine protection against persecution.

8 The Construction of a Religious system in the Gospel of Matthew

If we now consider together all the cultural frames that we tried to highlight, we can say that chapters 1 and 2 contain Matthew's religious system. On the one hand, it is a religious construction entirely centered upon the expectation of the future kingdom of Heaven. On the other, the two chapters intend to legitimize Matthew's Gospel in a context of cohabitation of different cultural groups (Jews and non-Jews). This cohabitation is supposed to continue over a very long period of time: Matthew seems to envisage the advent of the end after seven generations from Jesus' death.

Within this vision, the absolute certainty of the advent of the kingdom, the legitimacy of Jesus as king and Messiah and the message of the *ekklêsia* directed also to the Gentiles, are all of crucial importance. Equally fundamental is the conviction that the future advent of God's kingdom will involve fatal hostility and a deadly fight against the King Messiah and his followers. The struggle is both cathartic and renewing. Anthropologically, the perception of destruction or catastrophe implies a rupture that precludes any form of return

49 See Carter 1994, 2000, 2001, 2007. We want to thank Brian Dennert for pointing out the works of W. Carter that deal with some aspects of our paper. See also Evans 2007, 242–244 ("Matthew: A New Testament Jewish Gospel").

50 See Paul 2 Cor 12:9.

51 See Burnet 2003, 20–21 however, in a theological-spiritual perspective.

to the past or any restoration of power to those who will be defeated by the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven.

One wonders whether Matthew conceives the struggle as the total destruction of the enemy because he depends on Jewish apocalyptic eschatology, or whether it is his religious system (in which the struggle brings about the inevitable annihilation of the adversary) that induces him to adhere to the eschatological apocalyptic scheme. In reality no culture has just one solution to the problems it must confront. A radical final contraposition is only one of the possibilities envisaged by the Judaic culture of the time. The reasons for choosing between the different cultural possibilities lie below the level of awareness. They derive from a profound, interiorized cultural structure, from a *habitus* (in the sense of P. Bourdieu), rather than from an intellectual acceptance of conceptions (for example, apocalyptic-eschatological ideas).

It is necessary to highlight that Matthew conceives flight as a behavior to adopt in situations of difficulty. Flight means foiling the enemy's efforts, by making oneself unreachable. It is the opposite of annihilation of the enemy. Flight from an enemy seems coherent with the precept of love for one's enemies, which is characteristic of Matthew. It proposes the imitation of the behavior of God himself:

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven [...] Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:44–48).

Thus, two interiorized frames coexist in Matthew. They appear to be mutually exclusive: on the one hand, survival is possible only if the enemy is destroyed; on the other, survival is ensured if the adversary is made inoffensive. The first frame seems to pervade society in general, while the second is the one that must be adopted by the followers of Jesus.

The two different models of human behavior seem to bring about two contradictory conceptions of God. The former sees God as one who destroys his enemies, the latter as one who tolerates the "wicked" and leaves them to live alongside the others. The contradiction of these visions becomes less marked if we take into account that Matthew's chronological scheme involves a period of seven generations after Jesus' death. The period opening up before the followers of Jesus is long, and the end is far ahead. Matthew must justify a conduct that, on the one hand, preserves the certainty of the final scenario and, on the other, allows a long period of cohabitation before the end comes.

A third element of Matthew's religious system is linked to the fact that his *ekklësia* (Matthew 16:18; 18:17) is a minority group. Certainly, the *ekklësia*

maintains its dream of eschatological dominion but, for the time being, is marked by impotence. In situations of conflict it must avoid perils through flight. Matthew appears to belong to a weak and persecuted group within the Jewish communities of Syria. Nonetheless he assumes the task of announcing the future coming of a Judaic politico-religious domination. In brief, a minority with an urge to a political and religious predominant role builds its public and inclusive discourse on the realistic perception to be a group destined to remain a minority for a very long time.

A fourth element of Matthew's religious system consists of the use of models of interpretation belonging to different religious cultures. He uses sources of legitimacy that are acceptable from a Judaic point of view (the reference to Abraham and David, the concept of the final kingdom of God, the Jewish sacred scriptures adopted as documentary proof) and also from a non-Judaic point of view (astrological revelations, dreams, genealogical-territorial justifications similar to those found at the monumental complex of the Nemrud mountain). He appeals to some sources that are classically Judaic (Jewish scriptures, revelations of the Jewish God through angels and dreams) and to others that are non-Judaic or not exclusively Judaic (the appearance of the star and the revelatory dream). Indeed, the revelatory device of the dream is applied to many subjects: to Joseph, the Magi and Pilate's wife. Thus some legitimizing devices employed by Matthew are common to both Jews and non-Jews, a remark that holds also for the astrology and the genealogical-territorial scheme.⁵² In this way, Matthew aims to legitimate himself in the eyes of non-Jews, to whom he attributes direct revelations of God without the mediation of the Jews. The use of cultural mechanisms of different origins was characteristic of many Judaic-Hellenistic groups.

In conclusion, love for the enemies and recourse to flight are mechanisms that avoid all forms of compromise. In anthropological terms, Matthew apparently seeks to construct a religious system based on the opposition internal-external, Jews-non Jews, power and resistance to power. Faced with the Jewish authorities and the Roman Empire, Matthew suggests (a) flight as a means of escape from persecution, (b) the subversion of the friend-enemy relationship, and (c) the dream of a future, universal dominion. He tries to judaize the Gentiles and to convince them by means of non-Jewish sources of truth. Matthew's Gospel is the expression of a minority marked by a strategy of

52 See Goodenough 1958, 177: "[...] these astronomical symbols, and Helios himself, meant something in the Judaism of these Jews, something which could be as central in their thinking as the zodiac panels are physically central in the synagogue floors".

clandestinity and flight, and nonetheless never ceasing to proclaim the future defeat of those in power. It is a marginal and antagonistic minority group.

The religious system of Matthew, in any case, subverts the we/you (Jews/non-Jews) opposition. It proposes love of one's enemy (Matthew 5:44) as a model of intercultural or interethnic relationships. In this sense, it could be said that one of Matthew's cultural frames is the reconciliation of otherwise incompatible sections of humanity. Seen within this perspective, it is also probable that Matthew consciously had a project of connection and cohabitation among Jews and non-Jews. The project, however, plausibly implies some form of Jewish primacy. The reconciliation is imagined from a Judeo-centric point of view. Matthew's Gospel is the expression of a group of Jesus' followers that addresses its message to the Gentiles (Matthew 28:18–20). At the same time it makes known to them that they must accept the leading role of the Jews and, probably, an overall judaization. From this point of view, Matthew is in some way anti-Roman, since his horizon is constituted by the *ethnos* of the Jews and by the land of Israel, with no project of integration within the empire (considered as a political entity in its phase of final decline).

‘Mise en histoire’ and Social Memory: The Politics of the Acts of the Apostles

1 Placing Acts 13 and 14 in Context

Recent researches have brought to light a good deal of archeological evidence regarding the *context* in which the Acts of the Apostles locates their narrative.¹ It is precisely for such important evidence that there is an urgent need to reflect on a methodology able to mediate correctly between archeological and textual data.² Our basic concern regards the latter: we actually intend to concentrate our attention on the exemplary episodes that Acts 13 and 14 locate in Pisidian Antioch and Lystra.

Our conviction is that any type of writing aims to shape the social reality of its addressees. A text is, however, a source for understanding the cultural world of the author and of the narrator’s position in it. In the case of Luke, this means that it is methodologically incorrect to proceed to an investigation of historical, geographical, and material references mentioned in the Acts if the function they fulfill in the author’s literary strategy has not first been explained. This is even truer of the reconstruction of crucial events relating to Paul. In other words, a critical reconstruction of historical events reported in a narrative text must necessarily be preceded by a consistent investigation about the aims the author has in mind.

Also in the case of Acts 13 and 14, historical and archeological information should be taken into account to obtain a better understanding of the purposes of the narrator. We do not wish, however, to take archeological data into account for proving the historicity of Paul’s missionary journey and his preaching (even less, for a better understanding of the Letter to the Galatians and of Paul himself) but simply to gain a deeper comprehension of Luke’s

1 This chapter was first published in 2002 with the title “Paul’s Speeches at Pisidian Antioch and Lystra: ‘Mise en histoire’ and Social Memory”, in Thomas Drew-Bear, Mehmet Taslialan and Christine M. Thomas (eds.), *Actes du 1er Congrès International sur Antioche de Pisidie* (Collection d’Archeologie et d’Histoire de l’Antiquité de l’Université Lumière – Lyon 2), Paris, de Boccard, 2002, 26–36.

2 Cf. Destro – Pesce 2008a, 3–17; L.M. White 1995; Breytenbach 1996, 13–15. Cf. also Stark 1996, 23–27.

representation of the figure of Paul in the Acts.³ We will not be asking, “Why did Paul go to Pisidian Antioch?” but rather “why did Luke relate the preaching of Paul at Antioch?” While both questions are legitimate, they should be posed separately. We are not primarily interested in reconstructing the historical reasons for Paul’s journey to Antioch, as much as to investigate Luke’s strategy when he presents Paul’s speeches in specific cities.⁴ For this reason, we judge unreliable for us the opinion of some scholars who tried to explain Paul’s visit to Antioch on the basis of archeological data emphasizing the importance of Sergius Paulus family in the town.⁵

The episode of Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:14–52) cannot be isolated from the complex literary unity of chapters 13 and 14. The general aim pursued by the author in the two chapters seems to be to show how the Holy Spirit summoned Barnabas and Saul to a special mission (13:2). Luke’s main purpose, as presented in the story, is the conversion of the Gentiles. When Paul and Barnabas return to Syrian Antioch, Luke writes: “they related all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith unto the Gentiles” (14:27).⁶ It is obvious that the story of Paul’s first journey cannot be reduced to this objective, but the author himself does explicitly cite it as his main target. For this reason Paul’s speeches, two at Pisidian Antioch (13:16–41 and 13:46–47) one at Lystra (14:15–17), should be read together, and within the overarching perspective that Luke intended to give to the narrative unity.

Our main interest concerns the fundamental function that the Acts attribute to Paul’s three speeches as actions. Luke seems very sensitive to the performative aspect of the speeches, and to the effect his narration should have

3 For the Acts, for example, it is of great importance the attention to the conflicts between the early churches and the Jewish communities in their strategies of integration into the cities (cf. Destro – Pesce 2008a, 39–63). This intention is present in 13:50.

4 In the light of the interest that Acts 13–14 show towards the adherence of the Gentiles, the episode regarding Sergius Paulus is important because it records (as a first missionary success) the conversion of a Gentile of prime political importance (against Mitchell, 1993, 11, 6–8). Given the relevance of Sergius Paulus’ family, it cannot be excluded that, as a secondary purpose, the Acts wanted to remind the audience of the conversion of this important person.

5 Cf. Mitchell 1993, 2–10 and J. Taylor 1995, 1192–1194, 1205–1207.

6 It may be remembered that in 13:47 the mission of Barnabas and Paul, announced in 13:2, is defined in reference to the Gentiles: “I have set you as a light to the Gentiles” (Isa 45:6). As far as the content of the discourses in Acts 13–14 is concerned, it should be remembered that those of Pisidian Antioch culminate in Paul’s decision to preach to the Gentiles (13:46), while that of Lystra consists of an actual speech to the Gentiles.

on his readers.⁷ He wants to influence his audience, and give efficacy to his discourse.

2 The Reference to Antiquity. Speech as Action

In ancient societies, including the Greco-Roman one, the appeal to antiquity as a criterion of legitimation has significant implications. It provides credentials for peoples, political entities, and religious movements.⁸

What the three speeches at Antioch and Lystra have in common is that Luke is trying to provide foundations in antiquity to the new religious faith preached by Paul. In the Acts, however, the appeal to antiquity takes also the form of a re-writing of history, and not simply that of demonstrating its ancient origin. Jewish-Hellenistic apologists tried to show the antiquity of the Jewish people through the dependence of Greek philosophy on the Jewish Scriptures (Pilhofer 1990). The Acts, by contrast, present the new faith in Jesus as the realization of essential elements of ancient history.⁹

The mechanism presiding over this process of cultural reconstruction is complex. Ancient history is re-organized from the point of view of the protagonists that the author places on the scene. Luke carries out a "historization" or *mise en histoire*, creating a model of universal history that embraces the new religious movement, the Judaic people and the Roman-Hellenistic religions. In this way, the aggregation of Jesus' followers becomes the fulfillment of both Judaism and Greco-Roman religions.

At Lystra (Acts 14:15–17), Luke presents an opposition between faith in the only "living God" on the one hand, and believing in the Gods of Greco-Roman religions (condemned as "worthless things") on the other. Paul's speech does

7 On the subject of Luke's narrative intentions, R.L.Brawley has argued that in the Acts there are "legitimizing techniques" through which Luke is trying to "[throw] the senselessness of the crucifixion into reverse" (Brawley 1995, 1v). In particular, "Acts 13 uses voices of scripture to reverse negative social evaluations and to present Jesus and his followers as prominent in the social order" (Brawley 1995, 108). In a previous book, Brawley argued that Luke tried to legitimate Paul in a similar way. Luke portrays Paul "as faithful to the hope of Israel, and by outfitting him with evidence of authenticity in hellenistic literary terms" (Brawley 1987, 51).

8 Cf. Pilhofer 1990; Gempf 1993; Brawley 1987, 62–63.

9 For Brawley (1987, 1v) the recourse to Scripture "is among the primary strategies of making sense of Jesus". We do not deny that this intention (the "legitimization" of Paul and of Jesus on the social and cultural level) is present. It is, however, secondary to Luke's main intention: to give a foundation to the new religious entity through the speeches he puts in the mouth of Paul during the first missionary journey. On Act 14:8–20 see also Béchard 2000. 2001.

not justify the former through atemporal theoretical arguments. He simply schematizes a universal history in which the Jewish faith in the living God is constantly present. Idolatry is depicted as a deviation from the faith in the true God, which for a long time continued to act for the benefit of all human beings and “allowed all the nations to follow their own ways” (14:16). The same mechanism is also applied to the speech at Pisidian Antioch (13:16–48). Here the *mise en histoire* consists of considering the new religious movement as the final point of a history that began in the past when God chose the ancestors of the Jewish people (13:17). This *mise en histoire* is made possible primarily through including Jesus in David’s lineage, in such a way that Jesus becomes the conclusive figure of Judaic history. It is also made possible through a second mechanism: that of showing the relation between promise and fulfillment (Bovon 1987, 78–108). The election of the Jewish ancestors on the part of God is followed by the granting of promises (to the ancestors and to David) that have been accomplished only in Jesus.

At Antioch, two speeches are given in the synagogue on two successive Sabbaths. On the first occasion, Paul alone speaks, while the second speech is delivered jointly by Paul and Barnabas (13:46–48). The description of the background and of the occasion on which the second scene unfolds is extremely important, since “almost all the city” (13:44) is gathered in the synagogue. This means that not only Jews and God-fearers are present, but also Gentiles that are not God-fearers. It is a fact that provokes the reaction of the Jews of Antioch, or some of them, who protest against Paul’s preaching (13:45). It is at this point that Barnabas and Paul affirm that they will direct their preaching to the Gentiles, who in fact begin to believe. Here, too, the activity of the preachers is presented as a decisive moment of universal history, and as the realization of the history of Israel.

To sum up, the three elements of the *mise en histoire* are: the collocation of the group of Jesus’ followers within a general scheme of human history, the modification of the traditional historical vision of the other religious groups, and the birth of the new religious aggregation as the culminating moment of history. In conclusion, the *mise en histoire* of the Jesus’ followers is supported by a threefold strategy. What is of interest, at this point of the analysis, is the function of the speeches as such.

In the Acts of the Apostles the speech is the performative act of apostolic activity *par excellence*. For spreading the new faith the instruments are, first of all, verbal announcements accompanied by *sêmeia* and *terata* (signs, wonders and exorcisms).¹⁰

10 Cf. Destro – Pesce 2008a, 87–88. Cf. Acts 2:42–43.

From a general point of view, public speeches are effective actions through which a modification or even radical alterations are introduced into a social, religious or political situation. In ancient historiography, as it is well known, "speeches are not mere commentary on events nor accompaniment to events: speeches must be seen as events in their own right. Ancient historians tended to focus on [...] speeches as the events that shaped history" (Gempf 1993, 261). D. Aune has argued that while "in Thucydides speeches function as a commentary on events, in Luke-Acts speeches are an essential feature of the action itself, which is the spread of the word of God".¹¹

One of the fundamental effects of a speech is that of creating new opportunities for a group or individual or promoting an innovative truth. Speakers reorganize in a personally distinctive way the knowledge of their audience. They do not simply cancel the actual knowledge of their public, but introduce elements, which are unknown (Destro 1997), or capable of provoking an alternative vision, which enters into dialectic with previous visions. Speeches can evidently change the system of relations among subjects. In particular, they create interconnections between speaker and listener, which did not exist before. Within such a context, the relationships between speech and ritual assume particular relevance.

In the episode of Acts 13 a synagogue's liturgical system is supposed. Once the ordinary readings of the Law and the Prophets are over, Paul, who seems symptomatically to be sitting among the audience (13:14–15), speaks on the invitation of the heads of the synagogue. Luke carefully stresses that Paul speaks with the consensus of his addressees and enjoys their esteem.¹² He presents an event that conforms entirely to the expectations of the supposed addressees, complying with the norms and internal hierarchies of the synagogue. Moreover, when he begins to speak, Paul stands up, makes a slight gesture with his hand and invites Israelites and God-fearers to listen. From all these elements taken together, we perceive Luke's aim. Paul is shown as a person who speaks in an authoritative way: he has been invited to give a speech by the synagogue authorities (after the readings of the law and prophets). He speaks in a legitimate way to a legitimate assembly. His speech is automatically presented as part of the synagogue's normal liturgical system. In this ritual system, however, Paul's speech introduces a new vision and the relational system is altered: Paul is able to influence and reorganize the opinions of his listeners. The audience seems to react in various ways to his speech and this proves that Luke thinks that a new influential religious experience is inevitably beginning.

11 D. Aune quoted by Witherington III (ed.) 1996, 24.

12 Cf. also the case of Paphos, in which Paul is invited to speak by Sergius Paulus.

Also at Lystra, the ritual context is in evidence. After healing a paralytic (14:9–10), Paul and Barnabas are taken for deities. The inhabitants of Lystra say, “the gods have taken on human shape and descended among us” (14:11). The cultural model that Luke presupposed is that the gods can be present in a human form, as in the case of Ovid’s metamorphoses, where Jupiter and Hermes are presented as mortals.¹³ It is for this reason that a crowd guided by a priest of Zeus¹⁴ is on the point of carrying out a sacrifice in their honor. In other words, Paul’s speech is placed in a cultic context and in this context he can speak with authority. In fact, the crowd interprets the behavior and figures of Barnabas and Paul through the conceptions of their own religious culture: they are considered as divinities and ambassadors of a true message, as “guarantors of emissaries and missions” (L.H. Martin 1995, 155, 154). This makes the people favorably disposed to accept what they will say. In addition, also the sacrifice they want to offer is an act of welcome that should culminate in a convivial meeting. Thus the Acts create a situation in which Barnabas and Paul speak from within the ritual system of the Gentiles whom they wish to challenge.

It is important to note that the Acts of the Apostles present a doctrine against idolatry and a universal-historical scheme, not in terms of the traditional Jewish-Hellenistic doctrine, but making reference to elements of the local religions. The conception of God as giver of the rains (Acts 14:17), for example, is present in the second biblical passage of the *Shema*’ (Deut 11:13–21), and recalls Zeus’ role as giver of the rains present in Greco-Roman conceptions.¹⁵ In other words, Paul and Barnabas can speak from within a cultic situation in which they are invested with a credibility that was attributed to Hermes and Zeus. Their credibility and the comprehensibility of their action become the basis on which radical changes can be introduced in the religious system of their audience.

In short, Paul’s speeches in Pisidian Antioch and Lystra are placed at the center both of the Judaic cult symbolized by the synagogue meeting, and of the Gentile cult, symbolized by sacrificial rituals and by the temple of Zeus and its priest. In Luke’s vision, the power of Paul’s speech is proportional to the authority that is recognized to him by his hearers, and to the fact that it is performed at the heart of central cultic acts.

13 Cf. Breytenbach 1993 and 1996; L.H. Martin 1995; J. Taylor 1995, 1216–1220.

14 J. Taylor 1995, 1220, recalls “an important textual variant of the Alexandrian text” that implies the plural: “a college of priests serving the sanctuary of Zeus”.

15 Cf. Breytenbach 1993 and 1996; L.H. Martin 1995; J. Taylor 1995, 1216–1220.

According to studies on ancient Greek historiography, the speeches reported by first-century historians were not arbitrary compositions created on the basis of mere imagination. They followed cultural conventions. First of all it was necessary to ascertain that the speech had really taken place. It was required to respect the actual historical physiognomy of the person speaking, and to transmit what s/he had really said (Jervell 1996, 119–120; Witherington III 1996, 24–27). Since the orator had to keep in mind the context in which the speech was to be pronounced, also for the historian the reference to that context was a basic rhetorical instrument of the speech.¹⁶

A second point concerns the connection between speech, audience reception, and cultural re-foundation. One characteristic of the speech as performative act lies in the fact that, if successful, it has the effect of provoking consent and acceptance by the listeners. Such consent can confirm continuity of a group of followers around the speaker, but also can give birth to a new religious situation.

Luke seems to consider the conversion to the new faith as an event that happens immediately after the preaching, and not as a gradual process over time. This shows the absolute effectiveness Luke attributes to the speech as act. He seems to think that preaching is able rapidly to provoke an aggregation of believers.¹⁷ Actually, the speech that Luke puts into Paul's mouth is not intended to inform, but to meet with a prompt response. It sets out to solicit a reaction to the proposal of a consciously constructed and rewritten version of the religious history of humankind.

It is also important to note that, according to Luke, the speech that leads to conversion does not mainly consist of the denunciation of sins and an invitation to change a way of life, but is, rather, an invitation to assume a new attitude towards past history. We have to ask ourselves therefore why, according to the Acts, conversion requires a speech of a historical character, in the case of both Jews and Gentiles? The answer is that the new kind of faith implies a change of some cultural bases of those who are converted. The change does not consist of the reduction to zero of the entire religious culture of the converts, but a reinterpretation or modification of their foundation history. The mutation is radical in the case of the Gentiles (it leads, for example, to a change in the concept of God). It is less profound in the case of the Jews. This means

16 A. Vasaly attempts to answer to the following problem: "How do the transmitted texts of the fourth and the third *Catilinarians* demonstrate the ways in which Cicero might have made use of the setting of the speeches to achieve his ends" (1993, 39).

17 Even if in Acts 17 the conversion is of individuals (but this could be explained by the fact that the speech at Athens was not successful).

that the Jews who adhere to the message of Paul can remain in continuity with their past history. On the contrary, to non-Jewish believers is required a break and a discontinuity with their religious culture.

3 Public Speeches and Social Memory

What we have noted can perhaps be better understood by turning once again to the conception of social and collective memory and its construction.¹⁸ Collective memory is the totality of the notions we possess in common with others concerning the moral and material life of the groups to which we belong.¹⁹ As we have said it is widely admitted that individual memory does not exist unless it is rooted in a social memory. This kind of memory is always extremely crucial and however difficult to reconstruct.

Every concrete and historic culture elaborates its own social memory. "Groups provide individuals with frameworks within which their memories are localized by a kind of mapping. We situate what we recollect within the mental spaces provided by the group" (Connerton 1989, 37). In order to remember, therefore, it is necessary to situate oneself in a concrete context within a concrete group. Moreover, as P. Connerton observes, transmission from generation to generation is insufficient as an explanation of the *persistence* of collective memory. Connerton points out to the rituals as typical instruments of transmission. Rituality in fact consists in practices that allow to have memories in common, and help to renew them periodically (Connerton 1989, 38–40).

In Acts 13 and 14, Paul's speeches do not only connect the promulgation of the new faith to its *mise en histoire*. They primarily aim to modify or even eliminate the ritual actions of the two religious groups (Jews and Gentiles) to which they are addressed. In this way the act of preaching tends to modify the collective memory of the addressees, exactly because it tends to give new meanings to the ordinary rituals of the addressed religious groups.

The Acts, however, do not give us a speech, but the narration of a speech. The narration of the Acts is addressed to the readers of their time, and not to the audience addressed by Paul and Barnabas. In other words, through the historical narrative of the Acts, Luke contributes to the formation of the collective

18 See above Chapter 8, §§ 6–9. "Halbwach associe au mot mémoire l'adjectif social en songeant le plus souvent à la société en général et l'adjectif collectif dès qu'il s'agit d'un groupe particulier" (Brian 2008, 118*). See also Hübenthal 2014, 129.

19 Connerton 1989, 56. Cf. Radstone and J. Schwartz 2010; Misztal 2003; Agazzi and Fortunati 2007; Halbwachs 1925; 1997; 2008; A. Assmann 1999; J. Assmann 2013.

memory of the churches of the followers of Jesus in his days. The construction of a social memory for his religious group in his context is an evident necessity.

In the ancient world legends about founders of cities, religious institutions, or new religious practices were widespread.²⁰ Anthropological theories have often considered these foundation legends as the mythological statute of institutions, which fulfill pedagogic and didactic functions. In early Christian writings we find various good examples of the constructive role of such statutes, which, however, follow different paths from those of Luke. We think for example to the Prologue of John's Gospel or to the genealogy of Matthew. We propose to understand also the narrations of speeches in Acts 13–14 as pivotal cases of mythological statutes.

Luke has chosen events, groups, ritual settings, characters, conceptions, and scenarios that were well known and full of meaning to his addressees. In this way they could experience the story as part of their own collective memory. It is through these connections to the world of his addressees that Luke actually manages to penetrate into their social memory and to modify it through new ideas and information. Many elements of the context are used to let the addressees of the Eighties know what actually happened in a series of specific situations (in this case in the cities of Galatia).

It is the act of preaching that notoriously gave birth to new groups of Jesus' followers. In this sense, we may think that the narration of the preaching activity of the apostles is proposed as an act of foundation. The author of the Acts of the Apostles think that Paul's preaching was at the origin of new relations between preachers, groups of disciples, Jewish groups, sympathizers or proselytes, authorities of the cities, Roman authorities. Also, the meanings of the rituals and the concrete religious forms of the Jews and the Gentiles were fundamentally redefined by Paul.

To sum up, Luke needs to represent Paul's preaching performances in Pisidian Antioch and Lystra in order to construct the social memory of his addressees. It was necessary for him to produce an acceptable and effective text through which the new religious reality could be strategically placed not only within a universal history, but also within the historical boundaries of the existing religious groups, Jews and Gentiles.

20 Cf. Hanges 1995. See also Balch 2003; Wordelman 2003; More 1986.

Investigating Domestic Slavery in John

1 The Color of the Words. Temporal Alterations

Most ancient images, bas-reliefs and other artistic works encountered in archaeological sites and museums today do not appear in the form they had when they were first produced. Many of them have preserved few traces of their original, intense colors. The variation in colors induces us to concentrate on the temporal alterations of cultural forms and appearances and on the consequent instability of cognitive values. This instability allows us to understand that a picture or a bas-relief without color does not convey a correct and complete knowledge of the bright world of its time. It may give a false perception of that world.

Ancient texts are comparable to bas-reliefs or statues without color. Their words often result as discolored to our minds, do not fully transmit their original content and do not keep intact their cognitive values. Of course, a literary product is a medium of communication that uses graphic marks rather than images, smells, or colors. In any case, written symbols or literary media negotiate their meanings in relation to contexts. Their sense changes according to place and time, and normally undergoes unexpected alterations, evolutions, discontinuities or semantic losses.

The meaning of a written or oral word is given by the concrete social situation in which it is used (an event, a court procedure, a political act, a production of documents, etc.). Words are never pronounced or written outside a context or within a social vacuum. Outside of the settings in which they were located in the past, many words and texts of antiquity will no longer convey their original meanings. This means that a linear and direct comparison of meanings is only possible when we are dealing with identical (or very similar) settings. Where contexts are different, careful interpretation and cultural reconsideration are required.

As an illustration of the above remarks, we choose slavery, and especially domestic slavery, as the social setting in which the words and patterns of the Gospel of John should be reconsidered.

2 Sociological Definitions of Slavery

Two prevailing and opposite views have defined slavery as a system of *labor exploitation* or/and as a system of *ownership* (Patterson 1977, 407–449). From

the second point of view “slavery, as property, is first and foremost a legal institution”.¹ M. Weber constructed typologies of slavery on the basis of the different systems of production. The problem for Weber was “that of explaining why free labor and capitalism triumphed in modern society, whereas free labor gave way to slavery in ancient societies” (Wiener 1982, 391). In his classification he distinguished Ancient Middle East patriarchal slavery from Roman slavery (Weber 1995, 46–47), and the slavery of great Roman plantations from the lower middle class of urban slave artisans (Weber 1999, 180).

The concept of slavery as a system of labor exploitation has been challenged in many ways. O. Patterson proposed the concept of “slavery as social death”, and was convinced that this definition could be applicable to all forms of slavery at all times (Patterson 1977). For him, “slavery was not a system of labor, it was even less one of human property ownership” (Kolchin 1986, 770). Slavery, “originating as an alternative to death, usually in war, [...] represented a ‘conditional commutation’. The slave was “a socially dead person” without any independent existence. The slave was “denied all claims on, and obligations to, his parents and [...] blood relations”.² Slaves were the quintessential outsiders, without rights or honor. In this sense, slavery may consist of “the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonoured persons”.³

P. Kolchin has rightly pointed out the limits of this theoretical position. He admits that Patterson is correct in affirming that working conditions are not the only salient characteristic of slavery. However, Patterson’s definition (slavery as a system of violent domination and of social death) foregrounds a psychological element that does not apply to all cases, neither within the same culture, nor on a more general level. Although Patterson has effectively shown that slavery did not always constitute a system of labor, “he has not shown that it never did, and it is by no means clear that the psychological explanation he propounds is more universally valid than the economic explanation he challenges” (Kolchin 1986, 773). However, Patterson sometimes seems to recognize the limits of his definition, when he admits, for example, “that slaves did sometimes have social relationships, and were not in fact always ‘socially dead’” (and he insists that “the important point [...] is that these relationships were never recognized as legitimate or binding”) (Kolchin 1986, 773). As Kolchin rightly affirms,

more often, Patterson ignores striking contradictions between his theory and reality. Thus, he establishes that slaves were by no means always

1 Hellie 1976, 29, as cited in Kolchin 1986, 771.

2 Patterson 1982, 5, as cited in Kolchin 1986, 771.

3 Patterson 1982, 13, as cited in Kolchin 1986, 771.

ethnic outsiders—of fifty-seven slave societies, 75.4 percent had masters and slaves of differing ethnic groups—[...] and distinguishes between “intrusive” slavery in which slaves represented “the permanent enemy on the inside” [...] and “ex-trusive” slavery, in which the slave was “an insider who had fallen” [...] But, he insists that in both cases slaves were “nationally alienated” and “socially dead” (Kolchin 1986, 771).

Faced with such a variety of sociological presuppositions and explanations, it seems necessary to conclude that a definition of slavery embodying universal features is not at hand, or even possible. Nonetheless, each attempt to give a definition of slavery highlights aspects that deserve particular attention. In the present analysis of the Gospel of John, it is legitimate to take different interpretive models into account: slavery as a labor system, as human ownership, as legal institution, and also as social death. A number of additional distinctions must be drawn among rural slavery, urban artisan slavery and domestic slavery, and between foreign and native slaves as well. Precisely because of this wide array of circumstances, we believe it is important to make use not only of sociological perspectives, but also of configurations and classifications so far provided by the social history of ancient world.

Based on literary, epigraphical and papyrological evidence, we propose a profile of domestic slavery in the social context of the Gospel of John as follows: a) the slaves are the *alter ego* of the owners, they act as their deputies; b) their presence is indispensable to household life;⁴ c) the slave may be integrated into society as teacher, manager, philosopher, scholar; d) the main duty of a slave is faithful obedience, which denotes strong bonds and personal weakness at the same time; e) slaves may be subjected to any kind of domination, even “sexual exploitation” and “castration”,⁵ or they may be victims of slave traders or evil masters; f) in the context of social morality, a slave may be considered a dangerous element in the house, because s/he may be inclined to steal, flee, deceive or even kill the master.⁶ In other words, slaves may become socially unacceptable or threatening figures. In brief, a “model of slavery” must take into account slaves as necessary agents for their householders, as worthy servants, efficient substitutes for their masters. They may be viewed at the same time as victims of exploitation and mistreatments or, conversely, as disloyal persons or domestic enemies.

4 On the usefulness of the slaves, see the rich papyrological documentation in Arzt-Grabner 2003, 210–215.

5 Harrill 2006, 129–135; see also Harrill 2003, 231–254.

6 On “mastercide”, see Harrill 2003, 234.

3 Why does the Gospel of John Speak of Slaves?

It is important to note that representations of the slave as a morally ambiguous person, or as a person who represents a danger to the master are completely absent in John.

John's Gospel contains several passages which explicitly mention slaves, and one episode where Jesus is shown in the typical function of a slave, in the act of washing the feet of his disciples (13:1–17). Actually, among John's passages referring to slaves, three (4:46–53; 18:10; 18:18) describe their usual menial tasks (warning their masters, accompanying them, lighting a fire for them). John, however, reveals other aspects of the slaves' world. In 4:46–51, whereas the Synoptics speak of *pais*, *paidion* and *doulos* (Mark 7:30; Matthew 8:6.8; Luke 7:2.7), John specifies that the *pais/paidion* (4:46.51) was a son (*uios*) of the king's official (*basilikos*) and not of a slave. Probably, John was aware of the fact that, in the given context, *pais* could mean a young slave with sexual functions. In other words, John was well acquainted of the actual situation of slaves, and of the linguistic sensibilities of his addressees. This text (John 4:46–51), therefore, throws some light on the cultural context in which the author was rooted.

In the story of the miracle of the loaves (6:26), John is the only one to speak of a young boy who had brought with him food (five loaves and two fishes). The term he uses to designate this young boy is *paidarion*, a word used to refer to slaves in documentary papyri. It is certain that *paidaria* are slaves in a private letter of 100–120 CE, where a master recommends great care for his young slaves (*paidaria*).⁷ With equal certainty, the term *paidarion* is used for a slave in an ostrakon of the second-third century CE, where mention is made of the duties of a slave.⁸ Once again, the author's language shows how rooted he was in a cultural situation in which everyday life was permeated by important aspects of slavery.⁹

Also at the wedding banquet of Cana, the *architriklinos* is in all likelihood a slave. The term, which appears as synonymous to *symposiarchos*, defines one of the many tasks accomplished by different types of slaves in

7 O.Claud. I 151 (ca. 100–120 CE): Sabinos writes to Zosimos because he is worried about his young slaves (παιδάρια): Σαβ[ι]νος Ζοσίμω τῷφιλτάτῳ πλείστα χαίρειν. ἐρωτηθεὶς ἐπίσχες τοῖς παιδαρίοις μου, μή τις αὐτοῖς ὕβρις γένηται.

8 O.Bodl. II 1834 (II–III CE).

9 In the Gospel of John, we also find the words διάκονος and ὑπηρετής. The word διάκονος designates a function and not a *status*. In papyrological documentation it is attested for slaves, but also for freemen. The word ὑπηρετής seems to designate a public function (and not the condition of a freeman or a slave).

the symposial context. Its meaning is head waiter, or butler. According to W. Danker, *architriklinos* was “the slave who was responsible for managing a banquet (in Latin *architriclinus*, *tricliniarcha*)”¹⁰ and was probably equivalent to the *symposiarchos*.

To give an idea of the variety of domestic-convivial tasks performed by slaves, C. Osiek speaks of the

slave role in various forms of service at the household meal, the *convivium*, usually thought of as a less formal and more intimate dining occasion in a household context [...]. Roles of slaves include gatekeeping, guest control, food service, and wine service. The *obsonator* supervises banquets and sees to procuring what is necessary. The *vocator* or *nomenclator* acts as agent of the host or hostess, issuing invitations and assigning places. Other slaves welcome guests, help them to change into dining attire, wash and anoint their feet, etc. Between courses, they wash and anoint the hands of the guests. Those who serve may be called *ministri* or *ministratores*, in Greek, *diakonoι*. In clever presentations, slaves might also sing and dance as they present the food (Osiek 2008, 1).

In conclusion, John presents a realistic vision of the social figure of the slaves and of their subordination. It is domestic slavery that John has in mind, and we have the impression that the dependent life of slaves within a household was a very familiar scenario to him. The experiences and expectations of domestic slaves seem to have deeply influenced his way of thinking, to the point of becoming one of the metaphorical schemes through which he expressed the master-disciple relationship (and, hence, the nucleus of religious experience).

4 The Framework of John 13:1–17

In chapter 13:1–17, John performs an unusual operation. He deliberately creates a scene in which Jesus performs a servile task, typical of slaves. Here, the slave’s behavior is described, not simply presupposed. John makes of the ser-

10 Danker 2003, 139, and further: “Heliod. 7,27,7 ἀρχιτρίκλινοι καὶ οἰνοχόοι [...]. For the view that the context suggests equivalence of ἀ with συμποσίαρχος *toastmaster*, *master of the feast* (cp. ἡγούμενος Sir 32:1f.).” Calzolaio, 2009, defends however a different opinion: since ἀρχιτρίκλινος is only attested in John and Heliodoros, the word could be—in his opinion—a creation of the author of the Gospel of John, but this seems doubtful.

vile gesture of the foot washing (normally performed by slaves¹¹) a fundamental moment of the disciples' religious initiation.

We emphasize, first and foremost, that—in the scene of the foot washing—John's Jesus assumes the symbols of the inferior condition first through his clothing, second through his gestures. In the narrative, he takes off his mantle (John 13:4) (Destro – Pesce 2000, 41–64) and remains solely with the tunic (*chitôn*). A comparison with the scene of the crucifixion (John 19:23) tells us that, in the author's mind, Jesus was wearing a tunic under his mantle.¹² The linen cloth itself (*lention*) that Jesus ties around his waist, is a typical accessory used by slaves when serving a meal. The Greek word *lention* (Destro – Pesce 2000, 51–52) is a term quite widespread in symposial contexts.¹³ The corresponding Latin term *linteum*, for example, is found in an inscription on the wall of a Pompei triclinium: *abluat unda pedes puer et detergat udos mappa torum velet linteum nostra cave* (CIL IV 7698).¹⁴ The fact that it is correct to interpret Jesus' action in terms of a slave's function, is confirmed by Peter's reaction: "you shall never wash my feet" (13:8). This reaction presupposes that the performance of the foot washing implies the social inequality and subordination of the person who is washing the feet. Jesus' position as slave deserves close attention. It reveals that the tasks performed by a person are an index and a clear illustration of his/her identity and position, and that John is perfectly aware of this fact.

An important parallel to the Johannine foot washing as a gesture typical of the slaves, is the *Life of Aesop*, a text chronologically not far from John's Gospel:¹⁵

So Xanthos' wife, out of hatred for Aesop, tied a towel (*lention*) around her waist (*perizôsamenê*), took another over her arm and brought over the basin to the stranger. The man realized that she was the lady of the

11 The foot-washing at the entrance of the home or of the triclinium was normally performed by slaves (or by free women): see Plat. symp. 175a; Petron. 31; Plut. Phocio 18,3 (749f); Plut. mor. 242e–263c. (Mulierum Virtutes); Joseph et Aseneth 7,12; 13,12; 20,2–3.

12 Many images from the ancient world illustrate the way the ἱμάτιον was worn over the χιτῶν. The image 14 in Gardner and Wiedemann 1991 presents on the left, a slave "removing the sandal of a guest who has just arrived", he seems to have a belt around his waist with a *linteum* on it.

13 The word is absent in the Greek Bible and in the New Testament. This means that John derived it from the Greco-Roman symposial context.

14 Vössing 2001, 35–40. See also Suet. Cal. 26: *ad pedes stare succinctos linteis*. See also Carcopino 1995, 313.

15 See Bonelli and Sandrolini 1997; Jouanno 2006.

house, but said to himself, “Xanthos is a philosopher. If he wanted my feet to be washed by a slave, he would have ordered it. And if he has ordered his wife to wash my feet in order to show me honor, I do not want to bring dishonor on myself, so I won’t be a busybody. I’ll just hold out my feet and let her wash them”. So as Xanthos’ wife washed his feet, the man settled in and relaxed.¹⁶

The text is important because it confirms unequivocally that the *chitôn*, the basin, the *lention*, and the foot washing, are normal and necessary elements of the customary welcome performed by the slaves. This is why they are chosen by John (Pesce 1999).

We may affirm that the text of John 13:1–7 acquires meaning only when is set within the domestic role of the slaves in the Greco-Roman society (of which Palestinian and first-century diaspora Judaism were also part). This throws light on John’s cultural purpose. Making the figure of a servant a protagonist means bringing to the surface a deep cultural frame, widely understood in the author’s culture. The mention of widely known practices and conceptions conveys—with great naturalness and immediacy—the meanings that John wishes to channel into the initiation process of the disciples.

We have previously emphasized how, in Greco-Roman culture, the meanings implicit in the slave’s figure cannot be restricted to serving in the ordinary life of the household. We will give two examples of more delicate and important functions that slaves may be supposed to perform.

Slaves may undertake roles that are impossible for the master. They can become intermediaries in difficult personal affairs, and can face the adversary of their masters in their place. They are more than mere substitutes or simple replications of their owners. This is what J.F. Gardner and Th. Wiedemann have argued in connection with a first-century document from Pompeii (dated July 2, 37 CE): “slavery enabled a Roman master to perform through the agency of the men he owned actions he could not carry out directly [...] Slaves could act as agents for their owner in business deals, making valid contracts with a third party on his behalf” (Gardner and Wiedemann 1991, 74–75).

The document reads:

I, Diognetus, the slave of Gaius Novius Cypaerus, have written on the order of my master that in his presence I have rented to Hesychus the slave of Primianus Evenus, freedman of Tiberius Julius Augustus, warehouse 12, of the central Bassian warehouse, community property of the people of Puteoli, in which is stored wheat imported from Alexandria which he has

16 *The Life of Aesop*, 61, translated by Wills 1997, 198.

received as a pledge today from Gaius Novius Eunus; also in the same warehouse, on the bottom floor, is a space between the columns where he has stored 200 sacks of vegetables, which he has received from the same Eunus, as a pledge from the Kalendas of July for one sestertius (*nummus sestertius*) per month. Done at Puteoli (AE 1973, 143).

The employment of the slave, as an active *alter ego* of the master, could concern noble or ignoble purposes, and could affect prestige or status of the owner. In other words, the slaves were useful instruments, whereby the master obtained results that he could not achieve on his own. They were precious and liable agents that worked hard in favor of their householders. Being part of a household, according to D.B. Martin,¹⁷ meant that many of them “in spite of being slaves, could ‘serve’ as husbands, wives, children, parents, lovers, siblings, patrons and clients in relations with slaves freed, and free people”.¹⁸

A.M. Beavis (1992, 54) thinks that Greco-Roman literature offers parallels to the parable of the unjust steward (Luke 16:1–8). She argues that the *Life of Aesop* and Plautus’ comedies¹⁹ contain figures of slaves similar to the Gospel’s steward that through fraudulent behavior manage to obtain an advantage for their masters. It is obvious that in Jesus’ gesture all reference to the astute and fraudulent slave is unimaginable and out of place. Nevertheless, it does seem that underneath some actions of the slaves, a much more powerful idea of the irreplaceable function of the slave does remain. It is precisely because the slave can play roles that the master cannot play, and is capable of achieving goals that are dishonorable (or impossible for the master) that s/he becomes part of the deep cultural level of the Gospel.²⁰ In other words, John has chosen to make use of the model of the slave, seen not as a blind instrument, but as the clever *alter ego* of the master in special situations. When Jesus appears in the garments of a slave, he seems to recognize that *only* a slave can attain the purpose he aims to achieve. It is because it seems impossible to accomplish the purpose of his mission by acting as the powerful worker of signs or miracles that Jesus decides to invert his function and adopt the efficient role of the subordinate.

17 D.B. Martin 2003, 230. Martin’s analysis is based especially on funerary inscriptions.

18 TAM II 1044: “slaves could be patrons vis-à-vis those people who were their own slaves or freedpersons” (D.B. Martin 2003, 229).

19 See Beavis 1992, 44–49. In Plautus’ *Pseudolos*, the slave *Pseudolos* achieves through subterfuge and expedient a result that the owner Calidorus himself cannot obtain (see especially Paratore 1992, 341.355-359-365).

20 On slaves in the Gospel of John see also Osiek and Balch 1997, 188–189.

As we have argued elsewhere, John 13:1–17 presents a ritual of inversion of status. A characteristic of this kind of performance is its short duration: the overturning of status is normally limited to the period of time in which the ritual occurs. An inferior may play the role of a superior only within a clearly defined time span. He can perform it successfully and legitimately because everyone knows the meaning and duration of the ritual. Temporary inversion, therefore, is a technique that does not really change either hierarchy or roles, but suspends them for a while (Destro – Pesce 2000, 54–57; V. Turner 1972, 190). Once the inversion is over, each role is clearer than before. The inferiors remain inferiors with a greater awareness of their obligations.

To describe the initiation, John presents Jesus instructing the disciples through gestures that are centered upon customary habits and practices, but that are transformable into instruments of radical new meanings. Normally, the function of giving orders and being honored by servants pertains to the status of the owner. In the ritual described by John, Jesus is not honored and served. The function of Jesus, “master and lord” (13:13), is to serve. The sense of the overturning is clear. If the lord and master serves his disciples, they receive a dignity equal to that of the lord/master.

The basic characteristics or peculiarity in John’s foot washing (compared to the models of Roman slavery) lies in the fact that it is Jesus who adopts voluntarily the behavior of a slave (within precise temporal limits). Furthermore, the “lord” does not employ a substitute, but transforms himself into a subordinate. By becoming a slave, Jesus achieves otherwise impossible results. Jesus’ objective can be achieved only if the master changes his position towards his disciples, transforming himself and his function. This means that the paradigm of slavery, socially very instructive, becomes a departure point for revolutionizing the basis of the master-disciple relationship. Essentially, by adopting a servile role, Jesus makes the status of the slave functional to the achievement of his aim.

The master-disciple relationship takes eventually shape only through a momentary self-degradation, which brings the master condition closer to that of the disciple. By doing so, Jesus critically abandons or rejects the servile subordination that is normally imposed to the disciples. It is when the master modifies or inverts his relation with his followers that a change takes place. A real communion with Jesus (and among the disciples themselves) should be achieved according to a rule of equality: “you also ought to wash one another’s feet” (13:14).

Secondly, as we have said, what made the slave important was also his participation in the construction of a domestic unity. R. Saller has shown how, between the first and second century CE, the presence of slaves offered special opportunities in the planning of family activities, the transmission of property

and the modification of roles within the household. The Romans knew how to take advantage of the fundamental ambiguity of slavery. They could make use of the slaves in order to manipulate the size and the composition of their parental organization (Saller 1990b, 96).

In particular, Saller suggests that the separation of roles within the domestic group was dependent on, or affected by, the availability of slaves (Saller 1990b, 117–122). If the mistress of the house, for example, had her own slaves (independent of those owned by her husband) the reciprocal roles of husband and wife could be more distant. In other words, the presence of slaves introduces a great distance among household members. In the absence of slaves, the same members are forced to adopt more homogeneous roles: they are less isolated from each other. That is not without repercussion in the construction of lifestyles in the Johannine group of Jesus' disciples. It means that if John has the intention of proposing a model of life characterized by a close link among individuals, he has to modify the servile function inside the domestic group. John 13:12–16 makes explicitly this point:

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had reclined, he said to them: Do you know what I have done to you? You call me teacher and lord, and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, slaves are not greater than their lord/owner, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them.

John's Jesus asks the disciples to adopt reciprocally the function of the slave. He asks them also to renounce any type of domination of a member of the group over someone else. This means putting forward a practice of life in which the roles are similar and of equal value. The social ideal that John's Jesus expresses concerns the elimination of servile tasks imposed upon the slaves. It implies the necessity for each member of the group to assume the position of servant, in order to obtain a really close participation, a communion in which the roles tend to be undifferentiated.²¹

In John 13:16 and 15:20 a new aspect symptomatically appears. The Gospel states twice: "the slave is not greater than his lord". Once again John's viewpoint seems situated in the context of the house-slaves, and the sentence shows that John is well acquainted with the scheme of interconnections between

21 In John, there is no criticism of the servile function of the act of foot-washing in itself, but only its attribution to other members of the domestic group. See Destro – Pesce 2000, 155.

householder and slave. He does not eliminate from ordinary life the pattern of subordination that dominates the domestic sphere. The only way to escape from it is to assume the slave function voluntarily and act as a slave towards the others (as ritually represented in John 13:1–17).

It can be concluded from all this that a transformation of the same words occurs when they are shifted from one context to another, from the economic life of a household to the disciple's initiation. In any case, the domestic institution openly remains the framework that enables such transformation, thus giving meaning to new symbolic acts.

5 Slaves, Free Men, Friends

Other passages (John 8:31–35; 15:12–17; 13:12–16; 15:20) show that the master-slave (*kyrios-doulos*) relationship may be used as a cultural reference and as an instrument for understanding a central aspect of John's religious project.

Before the description of the process of initiation (in John 13), already in 8:31–35 we find a reflection on the master-slave relation that is essential to the discourse of the Gospel. John's Jesus says that whoever does not believe in him is like a slave, while those who are really his disciples, and "remain in his words", will become free men:

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you remain in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and *the truth will make you free*." They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and *have never been slaves* to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be *made free*'?" Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin *is a slave* to sin" (8:31–35).

These sentences clearly suggest that the process by which a person becomes a disciple is a transition from subordination to freedom. The final state attained by the disciples at the end of the initiation is full liberation. To represent the main aim of the religious life, i.e. total freedom, John openly makes use of a widely recognized cultural model. He appeals to the practiced paradigm of slave liberation (not to a moral doctrine, nor to a behavioral code).

Freedom is constantly desired by slaves. The slave's wish to be free is so powerful and widely accepted as to become the main term of comparison on several occasions. To achieve freedom means to express and attain the deepest human desires, also those of a free person. In a beautiful private letter of

14–13 BCE we read: “as a slave strives for freedom, I am striving for your love [...]”:

ὅτι ὡς δοῦλος ἐπ’ ἐλευθερίᾳ θέλει ρέσαι ὅψτω | κ γὼ (1. καὶ ἐγὼ)
τῇ ν’ [ζ] φιλίαν σου ἑλῶν [ἑλῶ] κτλ.²²

This sentence shows how the slave’s intense longing for freedom had become a fundamental model for describing the strength of inner feelings. It is essential, in this connection, to realize that John is influenced by this model of representing the innermost wishes of a person. John is deeply immersed in a culture that adopts slavery also in a powerfully metaphorical way.

John’s text affirms:

Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain forever in the household; the son remains forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (8:35–36).

The expression “to remain in the household” reveals that the focal point and background of John is the domestic condition of the slave. When speaking of slaves, he seems to refer to their servile tasks in a household.²³ In documentary papyri, the expression *menein en tē oikia* is very frequent, and always indicates the individuals residing within the house. The usual domestic area appears as a reserved place, in which the master lives with his wife, children, male and female slaves, and all of his properties. The master is supposed to consider it a place of tranquility, harmony and full possession, in which no hostile presence will be acceptable. Obviously, this internal and controlled space may be threatened by external violence and thefts. Many papyri speak of the arrival of thieves or acts of intrusion and robbery in the house.²⁴ In this way, they emphasize the inside-outside opposition and give more sense to the importance of domestic life.

22 BGU IV 1141, 24–25. Translation in Olsson 1925, 47–48.

23 The expression ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ is found in John 8:35; 11:21 (see also 14:2).

24 See, for example: P.Yadin I 21 (September 11, 130 CE); P.Yadin I 22 (September 11, 130 CE); P.Mich. v 298 (1 CE); P.Mil.Vogl. IV 229 (ca. 140 CE); P.Oxy. I 69 (November 21, 190 CE); P.Oxy. III 489 (August 27, 117 CE); P.Oxy. III 531 (II CE); PSI VIII 913 (I CE); P.Tebt. II 332 (November 18, 176 CE); SB VI 9458 (second half II CE).

Apparently, in John, “not always being in the house” (8:35) is a negative or disadvantageous condition. The right to reside *always* in the house is considered the best, most secure and honorable social situation. Thus, the master’s son, who always lives in the house is the one to whom stability and protection is guaranteed. The slave is an instable member of the household with no security. S/he stays in the house, but often cannot live there forever. S/he is the figure that dramatically seems to embody discontinuous relations.

Lack of security equally depends on the fact that the slave is a person constrained to obedience, but who is supposed constantly to aspire to freedom, to personal liberation. C. Osiek and D. Balch view the fact that the slave cannot remain (*menein*) in the house as problematic and full of repercussions:

slavery was never a secure existence and always subordinate, in spite of the possibility of great authority and responsibility over others. The slave had no claim to house and no rights to be respected in it (Osiek and Balch 1997, 188–189).

If permission to remain in the household was removed, important relationships were annulled. Outside the household system, the slave’s condition became extremely weak and precarious, her/his life could be under threat, and s/he had no real solidity or future.

Within this socio-cultural framework, the transformation from slave into freeman becomes a diagnostic instrument useful for explaining the condition that the disciple will obtain at the end of his discipleship. Like the freed slave, the disciple is no longer symbolically threatened by the danger of being cast out of the house, loosing all forms of protection. The disciple, once his religious identity is acquired, is and will remain ‘at home’.

John’s implicit view can be understood in the light of J.A. Harrill’s definition of slavery as an essentially contradictory condition. Harrill sought to combine the oxymoronic definitions of the slave-as-chattel, of a person non-person, with that of O. Patterson (slave as a socially dead human being):

Greco-Roman slaveholding [...] constructed “the slave” as an oxymoron, the “insider-outsider”—a person-non-person—of enforced and so dubious loyalty in an unequal power relation of chattel bondage. The oxymoronic construction of “the slave” served classical culture as a rhetorical, historical, and literary *topos* of moral polarity (Harrill 2003, 231–232).

In John, too, the functions of slavery are taken as a social index becoming a *topos* of moral polarity of crucial significance. One must not forget, moreover,

that in this Gospel the slave appears as attracted by the desire for freedom, on the one hand, and by nostalgia for the house, on the other. This is the background that should be considered as one of the hermeneutical horizons of John's religious project and of his mechanism of initiation.

In the narration of John 15:15 the master-slave relationship is transformed into friendship:

I do not call you slaves (δοῦλοι) any longer, because the slave (δοῦλος) does not know what the master (κύριος) is doing; but I have called you friends (φίλοι), because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

The most important aspect in this ideal process of change is clarified by the opposition between two sentences: "*the slave does not know* what the master is doing" and "*I have made known everything* what I heard from the Father". It is the sharing of knowledge that transforms the slave into a friend and becomes the instrument of her/his liberation.

The terminology of friendship, rather rare in John, is used here to define a central aspect of his religious project. We must add that in documentary papyri *philos* and *philia* express a wide range of meanings because of the variety of environments.

We also need to observe that the question of equality in status and reciprocity between friends lies beyond the limits of this work. We confine ourselves to underlining that, while the friend is granted full knowledge, the slave is denied it.

The comprehension of the cultural meaning of the passage from slave to friend, requires an examination of the social context of John a) about the relations, in which disciples are considered as slaves, and b) about the links of friendship between the slaves and their owner and between the disciples and their master.

From Rabbinical literature, we have information of disciples behaving like the agricultural slaves of their master, working in his olive groves while he is teaching.²⁵ A relation of subordination *mathêêtês-didaskalos* is attested in documentary papyri, for example in a "contract [...], in which [...] a boy [...] is given] for five years, to be taught the trade of weaving" (P.Oxy. IV 725).²⁶

The friendship of the master philosopher towards his disciples and the mutual friendship among the disciples are specifically attested only in literary

25 Pe'a 5,2 (18d).

26 B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt in P.Oxy. IV p. 206.

texts and only as an atypical and exceptional situation. According to Xenophon, Socrates

for himself, without making any such profession, [...] was content to believe that those who accepted his views would play their parts as good and true friends to himself and one another their lives long (Xen. Mem. 1,2).²⁷

As far as documentary papyri are concerned, we acknowledge the lack of evidence of friendship between master and slave. Not infrequently, what may be found is a relationship of animosity and conflict. The image of the slave, as we have said, may be that of a potential domestic enemy (Harrill 2003, 231–241; Harrill 2006, 145–163).

In any case, the terms “friend” or “friendship” must not mislead us for it may turn out that the bond between master and slave was in many cases positive, and even affectionate, without being classifiable as one of friendship. Sometimes kinship language is also employed. For example, D.B. Martin (2003, 226–227) quotes a Latin inscription from a locality near Philippi (101–300 CE) in which “A sixteen-year-old keeper of a *taberna* calls himself a homebred slave. He calls his owner his ‘father’ and also mentions his ‘mother’”:

*Vitalis C(ai) Lavi Fausti / ser (vus) idem f(ilius) verna domo / natus hic situs est vixit / annos XVI institor tabernas / Aprianas a populo acceptus / idem ab dibus ereptus rogo / vos viatores si quid minus / dedi me(n)sura ut patri meo adicere / ignoscatis rogo per superos / et inferos ut patrem et matre(m) / commendatos abeat / et vale.*²⁸

While the word friendship itself does not appear in the inscription, the terms used are implicitly charged with feelings that are as intense as friendship or love. Intimacy and trust are openly expressed in this text, while in other situations it is a strong familial and personal bond that is widely testified.²⁹ Of

27 Σωκράτης δὲ ἐπηγγείλατο μὲν οὐδενὶ πώποτε τοιοῦτον οὐδέν, ἐπίστευε δὲ τῶν συνόντων ἑαυτῷ. τοὺς ποδεξαμένους ἅπερ αὐτὸς ἐδοκίμαζεν εἰς τὸν πάντα βίον ἑαυτῷ τε καὶ ἀλλήλοις φίλους γαθοὺς ἔσεσθαι.

28 CIL III 14206, 21. Pilhofer 2000, 409–412, Nr. 416.

29 “A Latin inscription (TAM 4.147) portrays a man supplying an inscription for his *verna*, a man named Vitalis, who lived twenty-two years. The slave is called *amantissimus*, but the term was common enough that we should probably avoid reading an erotic meaning into its use here” (D.B. Martin 2003, 225).

course, in documentary papyri evidence is not lacking about affectionate concern of masters towards their slaves. Familial formal language may dominate over other registers. In one example, a mistress treats her slave as a daughter, expecting that she will take good care of her in old age.³⁰ *Philosotorgia* as heartfelt love or strong affection of slaves towards the master is attested in wills made out in their favor.³¹

We cannot ignore that human affectivity is an emotional, highly unstable state. In the case of Latin funeral inscriptions, cases are encountered where the words “*delicia* children” are used also in reference to slaves born in the house. They are classified as house-born *vernae*. It is hazardous to judge the sentiments suggested by these epithets, but they certainly reveal rather common attitudes of masters towards their slaves (Laes 2003, 313). Other evidence, hinting at cordial relationships between master and slave, can be found in the so-called *manumissio inter amicos* (*metaxu philôn*) attested by in papyri dating after the Antonine Constitution of 212 CE. It is dubious, however, that it refers to friendship. It may be simply related to feelings of trust, which do not usually require formal written agreements, as shown by R.E. Kritzer (Arzt-Grabner/Kritzer/Papathomas/Winter 2006, 278–280).

As P. Arzt-Grabner and F. Winter write on P.Petr. III 36 (218 BCE): “ein Herr sorgt normalerweise dafür, dass sein Sklave nicht zugrunde geht, und erst recht richtet er ihn nicht selbst zugrunde” (Arzt-Grabner/Kritzer/Papathomas/Winter 2006, 86). The worrying of an owner over the danger that his slave could die of hunger in prison is not necessarily a symptom of friendship. It may merely be a concern about his property.³² It is nonetheless true that also Seneca envisages a relationship of friendship between masters and slaves:

Servi sunt. Immo humiles amici; Non est, mi Lucili, quod amicum tantum in foro et in curia quaeras; si diligenter adtenderis, et domi invenies (Sen. epist. 47,2.16).

30 P.Oxy. L 3555 (I–II CE).

31 P.Oxy. III 494,5–7 (October 28 – November 26, 165 CE): (“wenn ich aber mit diesem Testament mein Leben beende, lasse ich unter dem Schutze von Zeus, Ge und Helios für ihr Wohlwollen und ihre Liebe meine Sklaven Psenamunis alias Ammonios, Hermas und Apollonus alias Demetria und deren Tochter Diogenis sowie meine andere Sklavin Diogenis frei” (R.E. Kritzer in Arzt-Grabner/Kritzer/Papathomas/Winter 2006, 279).

32 See for example P.Brux. I 19 (117–118 CE), where the owner speaks of his slave as his own property – l. 8: ὁ καὶ ἐνθάδε λογιζόμενος ἴδιός μου. See also SB XXII 15704,73 (after 138 CE Arzt-Grabner/Kritzer/Papathomas/Winter 2006, 161).

This moral reflection could be seen as confirmation of the fact that, normally, a real friendship did not exist.

6 Closing Reflections

What our research reveals is that John was well acquainted with the social reality of slavery, especially in the domestic context. John's terminology demonstrates his knowledge of the actual functions of slaves and the forms of links and duties that bound them to their masters.

The papyrological documentation relating to domestic slavery shows the variety of roles and positions of the slave, and thereby the structural function that slavery had in the Greco-Roman society. It provides evidence of the complexity of the slave *status* and of its systemic nature.

Unsurprisingly, it is the environment of the household that offers the perfect situation from which John can draw specific factors: the social oppositions of serving and being served, the superiority of the master over the slave, the aspiration of the slave to liberation, the manifold manifestations of friendship. The relationships occurring in the *oikos* constitutes the inevitable and necessary cultural support of John's religious imagination. In other words, it is in the household that personal ties may be continuously strengthened, modified, and destroyed and give sense to human interactions.

Clearly, John does not set out to change the social status of slaves and does not give up the slave's function in the society. Rather, he has a religious order in mind. The center of the Gospel consists of a process of initiation to which the disciples are submitted in order to attain a new religious condition.

The most important symbolic mechanism explaining this process in John is the ritual in which Jesus undergoes a temporary reversal of status. What matters in John's text is the transformation of the master, who assumes a servile role. Acting as a slave, he constitutes the dynamic center of the process. Essentially, John proposes the master-slave function as necessary for religious experience, but this function is inverted. Once the master transforms himself, the typical functions of the slave should be performed by all members of the group with respect to their mutual relations.

The theme of friendship is not often mentioned in the Gospel of John. It is the context of domestic slavery, characterized by a desire to reach a peaceful and affectionate relationship among masters and slaves, which generates the Johannine idea of the friendly status of disciples. We saw that friendship toward slaves was a topic present in philosophical literature. In documentary papyri we may find symptomatic signs of friendly relations and reciprocal affection

between owners and slaves, and occasionally unexpected and interesting backgrounds. On his part, John (despite a lack of explicit words illustrating friendship) lets us understand his evaluation of the complex relationships involved in slavery. He implicitly supposes the positive human relations between owner and slaves and incorporates them in his religious project.

Freedom appears in John as the final goal of the disciples' initiation. The process is conceived as an essential transition from subordination to freedom and can only happen "remaining" in the words of Jesus. In short, the condition of slavery is the point of departure in which the disciple finds himself, while liberation defines the arrival point. Implicitly, the metaphor of a slave's desire of freedom evokes the final stage in the religious progress of the individual.

One final point requires consideration. The liberation of a slave depends mainly on the decision of the owner. This fact makes the scheme of slave's liberation particularly appropriate for John. It makes clear the essence of the master's role: only Jesus can grant freedom to the disciples. Jesus' disciples cannot attain liberation by themselves. John is absolutely explicit on this point: "apart from me you can do nothing" (15:5). In this specific aspect, the Johannine process of initiation is dissimilar to that of the slave's liberation. Papyrological documentation supplies evidence of the fact that, in some ordinary cases, the slaves reach their liberation by themselves, through good behavior and loyalty toward their owners. In concrete situations, it is their economic activity that permits them to pay for their own freedom. This active participation of the slaves in their liberation seems to be absent in the Johannine model of initiation.

O. Patterson's concept of slavery as social death seems to clarify another aspect of John, because in the Gospel the slave and also the disciple are conceived as basically passive or socially inert. The fact that John imagines the process of initiation as a transition towards free life actually means that he considers the slave, and any man not yet freed by Jesus, as a socially dead person. We can apply to John the category of social death in the sense the in Johannine theology the slave and the disciple are unable by themselves to attain freedom, which is the goal of the religious experience. In contrast to Patterson, in particular, John has a positive vision of the slave as a substitute of the master, as one who can do what the master cannot. John's slave is an indispensable figure, insofar as her/his functions are unavoidable. That rectifies the image of the slave's inertia.

In John, therefore, the slave is on the one hand socially active, while on the other is religiously passive. Only further research can clarify whether John's vision of a passive role of the disciples in the process of initiation corresponds to a vision of the passive role of the slaves in the households of his time.

PART 4

Separation Between Jews and Christians



The Separation of the Jesus' Followers from the Jews: The Case of Burial Space

When, why and where Christianity was born are questions that are strictly connected to that of the separation between Jesus' followers and other groups of Jews.¹ Notoriously, scholarly opinions concerning this process of distinction are controversial.² We believe that new points of views and new kinds of material evidence can be investigated. We will, therefore, attempt to address the question from the point of view of cohabitation and occupation of space. A great quantity of archeological material—attesting the co-presence of Jesus' followers and Jews in burial spaces—needs close attention.

The proliferation of approaches is in some way a necessary effect of the acknowledgement of what anthropologists refer to as cultural complexity (Hannerz 1992; Remotti 2011). Plurality of interactions is a characteristic not only of the world in which Christianity was born, but also of our own times as reflected in the sub-title of a recent book: “Constructing the Historical Jesus in a Period of Cultural Complexity” (Moxnes, Blanton, and Crossley 2009). This means that our research on the relationship between groups of Jesus' followers and groups of Jews (*ioudaioi*) presupposes an anthropological approach to the multidimensionality of social groups. On the one hand, such approach submits to critique the concept of identity (Barth 1969; Remotti 1996, 2010; Baumann 1999), and, on the other, makes use of concepts such as “métissage” (Amselle 1999), “hybridization” (Canclini 2001, Bhabha 1994), and “branchements” (Amselle 2001). Within this perspective, we must recognize the validity

1 This chapter is the revised version of A. Destro – M. Pesce, “From Jesus movement to Christianity: A Model for the Interpretation. Cohabitation and Separation of Jews and Christians”, in: S.C. Mimouni – B. Pouderon (eds.), *La Croisée des chemins revisitée. Quand l'Église et la Synagogue se sont-elles distinguées? Actes du colloque de Tours 18–19 juin 2010*, Paris, Cerf, 2012, 21–49.

2 Dunn, 1999; Becker and Reed 2003; Pesce 2004b; Mimouni and Pouderon (eds.) 2011 are important books that together underscore the complexity of the problem, which obliges us also to investigate “how” and “why” the parting occurred. Judith Lieu also suggested that we have to ask ourselves about “where”, pointing out that the parting of ways may have occurred differently in different places (Lieu 2004, 218). See also Mimouni 2008a, 2008b; Fredriksen 2003; Kloppenborg 2015b.

of the idea that “groups exist from a certain point of view, but from another point of view they vanish” (Eriksen, 2009, 19).

Cultural complexity imposes the employment of different hypotheses and models. For example, it suggests to take into account that Jews (Solin 1983; Noy 2010) and followers of Jesus were immigrant groups in the great cities. Within the Empire, they constituted regional groups (Lyman 2003; S. Schwartz 2001, 104–194). However, anthropology of globalization is also useful for understanding the creative responses of local realities to processes of integration or legitimation at global levels (Appadurai 1996; Bauman 1998; Inda – Rosaldo 2002, Destro 2006), and can be used to interpret the local reactions of Jews and Jesus’ followers to Roman political and cultural dominance. Additionally, the study of the reactions of the historical Jesus to Roman globalization, on the one side, and of that of his followers, on the other, can be useful in order to detect symptoms of discontinuity between them, and moments of transition toward different attitudes about Roman society.

In view of the above considerations, we cannot concern ourselves with finding an agreement among different approaches. It is enough to ascertain some points of convergence. In the following pages, we propose two analytical models, or better, two perspectives: that of continuity/discontinuity and that of the plurality of components inside a religious system. They are merely heuristic tools whose aim is to throw light on texts and history. Further investigations may modify them, contradict them or even turn them upside down.

It is generally accepted that in the study of the relations between groups of Jesus’ followers and groups of Jews, we must take account of many different kinds of Christianities and Judaisms. In the words of Karen King,

at the beginning of Christianity, nothing of what would later define it existed: no fixed canon, creed, or ritual, no established institutions or hierarchy of bishops and laity, no church buildings or sacred art. The story of Christian origins is the story of the formation of these ideas and institutions. It is a story fraught with conflict and controversy. Early Christians hotly debated the meaning of Jesus’ teachings and his violent death; they experimented with ways of organizing their communities and determining who should be in charge; they disagreed about the roles of women and slaves; and they constructed boundaries between themselves and others in different ways, especially with regard to Judaism and Roman power. They developed distinct ways of contesting orthodoxy and heresy, and in so doing they created discourses of identity and difference that would pervade the West for millennia to come. Until recently, our information about these controversies came largely from the writings of the side that won and claimed for itself the title of orthodoxy. The views

of other Christians were either refracted through the accounts of their detractors or lost to history. But this situation has changed dramatically with the discovery of ancient manuscripts written by the historical losers, the 'heretics'. [...] In order to comprehend the dynamic processes by which Christianity was formed, it is necessary to set aside the winner's account of that period and attempt to place ourselves in the midst of debates whose outcome was not yet certain (King 2006, 1–2).

A similar idea is expressed by Pierluigi Piovaneli, who writes that:

Il serait même tentant d'observer que le XIX^e et le XX^e siècle, avec les innombrables redécouvertes des vestiges apocryphes du judaïsme et du christianisme anciens qui les ont ponctuées, ont été, d'une certaine façon, les équivalents de la période de l'Antiquité tardive [...] Après tout, en paraphrasant Shaye Cohen, il se pourrait bien que notre monde post-orthodoxe contemporain finisse par rassembler au monde pré-orthodoxe de l'antiquité (Piovaneli 2007, 295).

In the first two centuries there were at least three different types of groups of Jesus' followers: (a) those constituted only by Jews; (b) those constituted by Jews and non-Jews; and (c) those constituted only by non-Jews. Substantially, the relationship between followers of Jesus and Jews that did not follow him should be studied taking into account that both are to be viewed as foreigner within the Roman Empire and in Hellenistic or Roman cities. The two confront each other, at a time in which each of them is passing through its own process of participation to the surrounding environment. In fact, they experience integration processes that are asymmetric, each with respect to the other, insofar as the Jews try to integrate in the *polis* directly, while the followers of Jesus initially integrate only through the mediation of the Jews. In this sense they undergo, at the beginning, a phenomenon of obscurity, anonymity and lack of a clear identity. Only later they act publicly with a distinct social profile.

1 A Model for Understanding the Distinction between Religious Groups

1.1 *Continuity / Discontinuity and Religious Systems*

Some years ago, in the book *Come nasce una religione: antropologia ed esegesi del vangelo di Giovanni*, we developed a heuristic model to understand how, when, and where, a group of Jesus' followers could be considered as distinct from a Jewish group. The model was principally based on the concept of "religious

system”, which is composed of at least three elements: a group of persons; a distinctive set of ethical, ritual, and religious practices; and a worldview. It is not defined, therefore, by its ideas and worldvisions alone. The model presupposes that a religious system can be considered as separate from another, only when each one of the three factors is simultaneously different. When a group of Jesus’ followers is distinct in all the three elements from a Jewish group, one can affirm that the former has become distinct or detached from the latter.³

From this point of view, the fact that two distinct groups share common ideas (and even some religious behaviors) is not enough to explain them as similar or coincident. Some Jews and some Jesus’ followers may have shared conceptions (belief in the resurrection, messianism, idea of the *logos*, etc.) and also religious practices (for example, prayer, celestial journey), and yet may be separate and distinct in terms of the social groups of which they were members.

In order to understand the relation of early Christianity to Judaism, we suggest also a scheme of dissimilarity and polarity, and not only one of continuity and linear connection. A new religious system can take its initial form through a process of innovation and discontinuity. We do not presuppose that Christianity evolved from Judaism as a sort of necessary development. We criticize the old idea of a salvation history from the “Old” to the “New” Testament, in the sense of the idealistic history of the Spirit, or of the positivistic progress towards what is good and better. We assume, in other words, that Christianity was born as a new creation and therefore as an independent formation, not totally linked by tradition to what came before it. This should induce us to re-examine critically at least some aspects of the model of continuity implicit in the contested idea of the Judaic origins of Christianity.

In terms of discontinuity between Jesus and Christianity, instead of posing the question of how (or when, why, where) Christianity was born, we prefer to ask the inverse question: how did the different groups of Jesus’ followers conceive their own origin. The model of a tradition growing through continuity is in this way replaced by the model of the birth or creation of a religious system, which at a certain moment seeks legitimacy. Religious systems, in fact, can make use of different criteria of legitimacy. One of them can be, sometimes, the “invention” of a tradition. K. King highlights the discontinuity exactly in “the appeal to antiquity as a criterion of legitimacy”. It is well known that the attribute of antiquity is a necessary element in the ancient world to provide public credentials for peoples, political actions, and religious movements (Cf. Pilhofer 1990). King discusses the widespread phenomenon of adapting earlier

3 Destro – Pesce 2000, IX–XI.137–140. See Norelli 2014, 11.179.

texts, integrating, commenting and correcting them, which is similar to the related phenomenon of writing works using the names of major figures from the very early Christianity. "Writers appealed to tradition to support their arguments and tended to disguise innovations by presenting their ideas as the continuation of tradition or the exposition of its heretofore unperceived meaning" (King 2006, 10). History, however, consists not merely and not principally of a non-interrupted traditional thread. The different groups and communities that distinguish the history of early Christianity are not primarily stages of an evolution. In general, they are bearers of discontinuity and innovation.

1.2 *Social Complexity. Correlation of Three Factors of a System*

In our discussion, we concentrate only on one of the three elements of a religious system: the group. First of all, social groups take the form of territorial settlements (habitational, residential, urban-based or rural, etc.). They are geographically situated in the context of political and cultural units and are therefore in contact with other major, minor or marginal groups. In concrete, this means that a group largely defines itself in terms of its localization, in terms of the actual spaces it occupies and of their relevance and function in an active and defined context. Secondly, a group may be homogeneous, consistent, monolithic, or may contain sub-groups. In our perspective, what is important is that a sub-group is an aggregate that enters in relation with the larger society not directly, but only through the mediation of the group of which it is a part.

It is commonly affirmed that the first-century Jesus' followers used to gather in houses. This affirmation may become misleading, if one does not take account of the fact that these houses had diverse characteristics. They had usually different functions and usages. The First Letter to the Corinthians mentions an occasion of worship in which "all the *ekklêsia*" was gathered (14:23). This fact leads us to suppose that there were a number of partial meetings, taking place in different houses. The Third Letter of John also presupposes a certain number of houses with specific functions, that of Diotrephes and that of Gaius (vv. 5–6,9), where Jesus' followers gathered, but also the house where the Presbyter resided. Perhaps the latter served other purposes too, connected to the organization of itinerant preachers, and, perhaps, to the production of texts for the Johannine groups (such as the First Letter of John) (Destro – Pesce 2003a, 36–39). We may add that the Acts of the Apostles 19:9 affirm that Paul rented a room or a space in a building (the *scholê* of Tyrannus), where he carried out his teaching. Were this a historical fact, we would have proof that, alongside the houses that hosted gatherings of a liturgical nature, there existed others with different destinations. It is certainly important that the *Acts of Justin Martyr*

(*Passio sancti Justini et socii* 3,1–4) of the second century mention the house that Justin rented to carry out his philosophical and theological teaching.

This calls for a clarification of the nature of the groups of Jesus' followers. The fact that they in the earliest period of their expansion used houses, does not allow one to merely affirm that "the first and [...] the most fitting concept we have" to define the nature of Jesus groups "is that of *oikos*" (Lampe 2003, 374). In reality, this is mistaking the container for the content. The groups of Jesus' followers used the *oikos* (household); they did not constitute an *oikos*. They did not simply use private dwellings, but were defined by a multiplicity of functions and modes of occupation of places. Also an undifferentiated concept, like that of "community", does not help to understand such multiplicity. The diverse terms encountered in the literature of the second century (*didaskaleion, scholê, ekklēsia, collegium, curia, laòs, conventiculum*) point to a certain indeterminacy of the Jesus groups (Lampe 2003, 373).

In studying the religious practices and worldviews of groups of Jews and of groups of Jesus' followers within Mediterranean towns and villages, it is helpful to visualize a triangular relationship, in which the sides and angles of the triangle are not symmetric. Recent research has in fact made clear that the two types of groups were often minorities within villages, cities, and socio-political organizations throughout the Roman Empire. This means that the two kinds of groups were cohabiting and interacting with each other—albeit in an asymmetrical way—within a web of Roman-Hellenistic environments that critically influenced them both. The vertex of the triangle is represented precisely by a Greco-Roman cultural setting, often dominant with respect to the other two. This means that it is not enough to take into consideration a bipolar relationship (between Jesus' followers and Jewish groups), or to compare only two sides of the triangular relation.

Obviously the characteristics of Jews and Jesus' followers largely depended on their distance or proximity to the main vertex, and not primarily on their reciprocal links, or on the respective connection of one with the other. Some researches have cast light on how the religious practices and conceptions of Jews and Jesus' followers, while at times highly distinctive, were in many cases widely shared by other religious groups situated in the same areas. They were influenced by the same cultural traits, behaviors and habits, such as sacrifice, prayer, and practices of contacts with the supernatural (e.g. ecstasy, heavenly journeys, visions, dreams, etc.; Destro – Pesce 2011c, 169–172, 175–184).⁴

4 See chapter Five of this book.

1.3 *Cohabitation among Groups Living Face to Face. Confrontations and Cultural Tools*

We assume that the so-called Gentile world was the principal pole of cultural organization in the towns and villages where Jews and Jesus' followers used to live. In order to understand the relations between the two kinds of groups, we need to employ the notion of cohabitation, and to distinguish between the aims and instruments of cohabitation.

If cohabitation takes place in an enduring way, it always involves some form of sharing of cultural tools. The cohabitation of groups of Jews and Jesus' followers within the Roman-Hellenistic world involved the sharing of forms of settlements, cosmological schemes and worldviews, political practices, texts, and religious performances (Destro – Pesce 2011b, 385–386). The common use of cultural tools remains, however, different from strategical processes of integration.

In their cohabitation within the cities of the Roman Empire, Jews and Jesus' followers may purposely or occasionally differentiate. In ordinary life, there can exist periods of reciprocal indifference or absence of cooperation. Weak groups can be primarily committed to their own survival, finding protection in a state of marginality or separateness. In the long term, however, separateness is not easily maintainable.

Groups often manifest wide strategies and deep social concerns that can be divergent. Cohabitations can sooner or later involve common aims, because “bonds and boundaries are inseparable” (Rajak 2001a, 461). In some cases, the aim may be that of juridical integration by means of a legislation that allows the exercise of specific rights (Josephus, *Ant.* XVI, 160–178; XIX, 278–291; XIV, 306–323; XX, 13). In others, the objective may be that of a generic egalitarian integration, which should guarantee the same rights and functions as those enjoyed by other groups (see Lyman 2003; Josephus *Ant.* XVI, 174–178). Sometimes, again, the aim may be to obtain a future hegemonic position. The ultimate hegemonic goal may be either explicit or, to various degrees, dissimulated, and can be sought by manipulating institutions and common cultural elements. An example of dissimulation is that of Flavius Josephus, who in the *Jewish Antiquities*, systematically omitted the parts of the Book of Daniel that speak of the fifth final kingdom (*Ant.* x, 203 ff.), that of Israel's hegemonic dominion of the world (Troiani 1987). An opposite example is that of Christian millenarianism, which openly speaks of the messianic kingdom (see Revelation 20:3–7; 21:1–4.10.23–27; 22:1–5⁵ and Justin, Dialogue 80, 5) (Nardi 1995). A further important opposite example is that of the Christianity of the

5 See Lupieri 1999, 324–329; 344–349. See also 309–310. 314–321.

fourth and fifth century, which shows a certain tendency to destroy or subordinate different religious groups (Pesce 2008, 122–152; Beatrice 1999). Following a historiographic interpretation, this kind of Christianity is nothing more than a coherent development of early Christianity, which, from the outset, carried in its “nature” an urge toward political and religious world domination. A group of this kind could cohabit with other groups because its fundamental strategy for arriving at a political religious world dominion was dissimulated.

The various aims and strategies of cohabitation between Jews and Jesus’ followers can also be analyzed in a different way. Robert Redfield, using a somewhat archaic anthropological scheme (Redfield 1961), spoke of “great” or “small” traditions. According to this scheme, differences exist at the level of “small traditions”, while uniformity prevails at the level of “great traditions”. In important questions, uniformity is generally required and this is the reason why in some cases the necessity emerges of a distinction between orthodoxy and heresy. By contrast, deviations are permitted on ordinary issues. Within this perspective, cohabitation is often supposed a value to be defended by means of special arrangements that do not threaten the “great tradition”.

A modern example of deviations in issues of day-to-day convenience is given by the fact that contemporary Christian minorities in some Muslim mountain villages in Lebanon celebrate the Muslim feast of the ram (Kanafani – Zahar 1999). This scheme of cohabitation, although it cannot be indiscriminately applied, contributes to providing a realistic view of cultural borrowings, exchanges, acquisitions, which are never totalizing events without internal modulations. In other words, coexistence of various groups within the same territory implies a cultural traffic in which many different elements can be adopted, transformed, transmitted or rejected on the basis of different justifications and a variety of needs.

2 **Examples of Cohabitation in Central and Peripheral Areas of the Roman Empire**

Cohabitation of various groups within the same area can produce osmosis, but also produces distinction and separation. Many spaces are destined to uses that segment or specify the ordinary life. Among them those destined to the burial of the dead are of great importance. In fact, the mode of occupying burial spaces is one of the ways of marking the reciprocal coordination or inevitable separation among groups, also in the case of Jesus’ followers and Jewish groups.

Burial sites present archeological and historical evidence spanning long periods. Usually, these sites have been employed, generation after generation, by different users. The fact that the same area of inhumation has been used by groups possessing dissimilar perspectives, conveys over time an image of cohabitation. Conversely, a burial place where the tombs of a single specific group are located, may convey an image of separation and of exclusive occupation of space.

Let us focus on two areas of the Roman Empire. One is urban, the other mainly rural. One is central (the city of Rome), the other peripheral (the Golan Heights). One had a pagan majority, the other was located in the Land of Israel and probably had a Jewish majority.

2.1 *Coexistence and Separation of Christian, Pagans, and Jewish Tombs in Rome*

The importance of epigraphic documentation for the study of Christian and Jewish catacombs in Rome is widely recognized. By definition, epigraphs are written materials on public display, and are therefore elements contributing to define identity. According to Carlo Carletti (2008), an “epigraphy of the Christians” (as opposed to a Christian epigraphy) is only encountered starting from the third century on, meaning that, until this time, there was no manifestation of Christian identity in the places in which epigraphic production appeared. For two centuries Jesus’ followers did not produce epigraphic materials on which Christian symbols were shown. This could be a strong sign of the fact that Christian characterization in burial space—as distinct from that of the Jewish groups with whom Jesus followers cohabitated—did not exist.

In the pre-Constantine era, Rome shows the most consistent documentation of epigraphies commissioned by Christians. “This production [began] around the time of Zephyrinus and Callistus (199–222) in the original areas of the catacombs”. But only a part (17%) of the inscriptions shows “expressly identitary formulas” (Carletti 2008, 34–35). It is fundamental to observe that these formulas certainly reveal the emergence of a Christian specificity, but they do so in forms that are profoundly linked to Jewish and classical/pagan ones and were dependent on them.

Christian inscriptions show strong similarities with Jewish epigraphs, precisely in the use of the word “peace”. The expressions *pax*, *pax tecum*, *eirêne soi* (found in the funerary inscriptions of Christians) are actually similar to those of Jews. Their “most immediate model is in Jewish funerary practice [...] in the cemeteries of Jaffa, Bet Shearim, the ossuaries of Jerusalem and, in Rome, in the catacomb of Vigna Randanini, of pre-Constantinian formation”

(Carletti 2008, 35). For example, in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum* (CIJ) 644, we encounter the expression: *Hic requiescit in pace bonae memoriae*. Such cases are abundant: CIJ 11, 892–960 (II–III century); 993–1161 (II–IV century); 1210–1387 (II b.CE–II CE). The inscriptions reveal that the followers of Jesus employed the distinct funerary language of the Jews, and that, at least in this respect, they did not manifest a real distinction from Jewish groups in the first two centuries.

Contemporarily, the funerary inscriptions of the followers of Jesus are also related to pagan ones. They use, for example, an expression of greeting to the deceased that corresponds to a pagan expression. Pagan tombs bear the greeting *salve, ave, vale, chaire*. These formulas, in tombs of Jesus' followers, were substituted by *pax, pax tecum, eirène soi*, which have the same structural function of greeting of the pagan terms. In other cases, we even observe the coexistence and juxtaposition of a formula used by Jesus' followers with a pagan one, as in the case of *Leonti pax a fratribus vale* (Rome cemetery of Priscilla, marble slab ICVR IX 25319) (see also ICVR I 1261, 692; II 7274; IV 12839; VI 15871; VII 21527; IX 26037⁶).

The turning point in the epigraphic production of Christians came in the period between third/fourth decade of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth (Carletti 2088, 49). This period is the so-called golden age of Christian epigraphy. An essential fact is that a large majority (94%) of inscriptions takes the form of funerary epigraphs. It is from this moment that the funerary inscriptions of the Christians present distinctive formulas. Since epigraphs have always an essentially public nature, the appearance of clearly Christian traits reveals a marked distinction in the cohabitation of Christians in relation to other groups. In this period, together with the development of the formulas of peace, there is evidence of the “development of an expressive style that translates into epigraphic formulas [...] the founding motifs of the new faith. [...] The set of formulas is not the patrimony of all, indeed not even of the majority [of Christians], but is concentrated in specific circles of the community, particularly the lay and ecclesiastic aristocracies, or emerges as a characteristic element of particular circumstances” (Carletti 2088, 53). It could mean that only those of the higher class tend to differentiate themselves, a circumstance that remains uncertain, however. In fact, the lack of epigraphs of Christians of the so-called lower classes could depend on their limited economic opportunities, and not on their little distinction from other religious groups.

The accentuation of a specific identity among Christians can be summed up in five points.

6 See also Carletti 2008, 150.

a) The mention of initiation rites in funerary inscriptions is one of the most eloquent signs of Christian distinctiveness. "The explicit references to baptism are about 80, ranging chronologically between around 330 and the mid-fifth century. Those mentioning the *status* of pre-baptismal instruction (*catechumenus*, *audiens*, *candidatus*, *katêchoumenos*, *akroatês*) are just 10, while those referring to the newly baptised are more numerous (over 140)" (Carletti 2008, 53).

Inscriptions that mention initiation bear witness to the differences "between the doctrine taught by the Church and its impact on the average Christian":

the mature age of the newly baptized deceased (from 20 to over 70 years) leads us legitimately to suppose a deliberate postponement of baptism until the approach of death [...] Many embarked upon catechumenal instruction, but fewer completed it, as hotly denounced by Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose, and Augustine (*Cat.* 17,35–36; *In Ps.* 118, 20, 48–49; *Serm.* 47,17; *De cat. rud.* 5,9) (Carletti 2008, 54).

This fact probably testifies in favor of a non-distinction of Christians from their surrounding environment, and is one of the many confirmations that the social reality of the Christians cannot be deduced from theological texts alone.

b) "In place of *frater*, characteristic of the pre-Constantine era, the fourth and fifth centuries saw a rather pronounced diffusion of terms like *fidelis*/*fidelis in pace*, *fidelis facta*, *devotus*, *famulus dei*, *servus dei*, *ancilla Dei*, *ancilla Cristi*, *ancilla Domini*, *Theou doulos pistos*. It is always very important to note the local or regional differences in the processes of differentiation, contact, cohabitation, and identity construction". "In the Iberian peninsula, for example, with particular frequency at Merida, from the mid-fifth century on, there is an increasing frequency of the modulus *famulus dei/christi*" (Carletti 2008, 55). The use of these genitives points to a stronger sentiment of Christian belonging.

c) In the western area, the terms *christianus* / *christianos* are very rarely used. In Rome, no exemplars of these titles have been found prior to the middle-fourth century. According to Carletti "the use of *christianos*, much more frequent in Sicily and especially at Syracuse⁷ than in other centers, seems already to present itself as a deliberately distinctive term for members of the Church" (Carletti 2008, 56).

The absence of the term Christian (either in Latin or Greek) constitutes an ambiguous datum, since it could point to a scarce need to underline an identity that was obvious in mainly christianized environments, while its presence

7 See inscriptions collected by Carletti 2008 nr: 86, 89, 135, 144, 193.

could stem from the desire or necessity, perceived by a minority, to underscore its difference.

d) It was in the time of Damasus (366–384 CE) that places of worship were built above the presumed tombs of martyrs, with the religious intent of creating spaces for religious gatherings, even centers of pilgrimage, in competition with, or as an alternative to the temples of non-Christian religions. The so-called *ad sanctos* tombs were situated around these martyrs' burial places because of the religious belief in the benefit obtained from proximity to a martyr's body. Most of those benefits belonged to the aristocratic laity and the priestly classes, who were able to guarantee this privilege for themselves. But the same privilege was not rarely obtained by a multitude of anonymous members of other classes. In this way the church in which the tomb of the martyr was located became the focus of sepulchral complexes that possessed an undoubtedly Christian identity (Rebillard 2003, 113–118; Carletti 2008, 74–97).

e) Only from the end of the second or beginning of the third century, according to a prevailing historiographic view, we find evidence in Rome of the existence of catacombs, intended as institutionalized places reserved for Christians. In the same period, there is also evidence in Rome of catacombs reserved for the burial of Jews, which means that, before that period, the groups of Jesus' followers and the Jewish groups did not feel the need of separating the burials. The deceased Christians could cohabit with pagans and Jews dead people.

These historiographic theses have recently been cast in doubt. According to Mark Joseph Johnson,

an examination of Roman law and church decrees concerning funerary practices shows no legal basis for the forced separation of pagan and Christian burials. Nor is there any concrete evidence from patristic writers that such an action was universally banned in the early Church (Johnson (1997, 37)).

Archaeological evidence demonstrates that

the development of Christian cemeteries from pagan burial grounds and the fact that in the fourth century such mingling of Christians and pagans in the tomb still occurred. Therefore, paintings with pagan themes such as those in the Via Latina Catacomb in Rome may be taken at face value, without the need to find some underlying Christian meaning. Much has been written about the “pagan-Christian conflict” of fourth-century Rome and the gradual christianization of the largely pagan society. One

aspect of this religiously polarized society, which remains somewhat unclear, is whether or not this conflict extended into the grave. That is, was it permissible in the fourth century for Christians and pagans to be buried side by side? (*ibidem*).

E. Rebillard, has written

il semble bien que les chrétiens, comme les autres groupes religieux, n'aient pas eu de raisons religieuses pour privilégier une forme de sépulture commune, aux dépens de la sépulture familiale notamment. Les pratiques funéraires et plus spécifiquement le choix d'une sépulture ne semblent pas avoir été, dans l'Empire romain, des éléments importants dans la construction d'une identité religieuse. Si l'appartenance à un culte, une synagogue ou un Église n'a pas été un facteur déterminant dans le choix d'une sépulture, nous avons vu intervenir à plusieurs reprises l'appartenance à une association, ou college (Rebillard 2003, 49).

The catacombs were supervised by *collegia* of *fossore*s and were burial sites originally created and used by pagans. Subsequently, they were used by Christians and pagans together. In the fourth century, however, as we have seen, the situation seems to have changed, although Rebillard maintains that, also in the fourth century, the burial of pagans and Christians side by side continued in the smaller catacombs. In the large ones, where numerous Christian tombs are found, coexistence went on, and, above all, one certainly cannot speak of them as Christian cemeteries managed by the Church. The distribution and administration of Christian burials, according to Rebillard, was supervised by *collegia* of which Christians were members. In his view, often they were “des collèges de chrétiens sans être cependant des collèges chrétiens”. Rebillard therefore poses two theses. First, Christian and non-Christian were not hostile groups:

À travers le prisme des pratiques funéraires, il apparait en effet que les chrétiens, y compris au III^e siècle, ne constituent pas des groupes fermés et hostiles ainsi qu'ils sont encore souvent décrits.

There existed

... interaction des chrétiens et des non-chrétiens dans une société dont les structures ne changent pas fondamentalement, ni au III^e siècle avec la “crise”, ni dans la deuxième moitié du IV^e siècle quand la religion chrétienne devient la religion de l'empereur (Rebillard 2003, 200).

Secondly, the Church did not directly oversee the burials.

Dans l'antiquité tardive, le christianisme lasse en dehors de sa sphère ce qui concerne la sépulture des morts et même, dans une très large part, ce qui concerne leur mémoire (*ibidem*).

The idea that the Christian catacombs, from the fourth century on, were not Christian funerary sites supervised by the Church is much discussed. What interests us here, however, is the previously mentioned fact that from the second half of the fourth century in the time of Damasus, forty Christian churches were erected above the tombs of martyrs, around which well-defined Christian burial sites were created. It means that a distinction of identity was, at this time, publicly recognizable, thus denoting a deliberate intention to occupy and define public areas with Christian symbols and practices (Rebillard 2003, 113–118; Carletti 2008, 74–97).

Concerning the burial of Jews in Rome, also the old thesis that “the Jewish catacombs were used only by Jews” (Hachili, 1998, 266; Pergola 1997, 83–87) has been called into question (Rebillard 2003, 31–39). T. Rajak wrote:

Evidently, the Roman catacombs were Jewish burial areas, and many Jews chose to be buried among their co-religionists. But have we any ground for seeing the separation of Jews in death either as total, or as dogmatic?” (Rajak 2001c, 442–23). “I have collected material on mixed burial from various Diaspora sites and had come to conclusions very similar to those now admirably presented in Rutger’s recent study⁸ (Rajak 2001c, 443).

2.2 *Coexistence of Christian, Jewish, and “pagan” Tombs in the Golan Heights*

We now consider a marginal area of the Roman Empire, the Golan Heights. In 1996 Robert C. Gregg and Dan Urman⁹ presented their analysis of epigraphic material found in the Golan (over a period of twenty-five years). The region largely consists of rural countryside, distant from Rome, in the eastern part of the Empire. It is an area of particular importance since

historians typically find the religious energies and dynamics of the Roman and Byzantine countryside more elusive and difficult to ascertain

⁸ See Rutger 2000.

⁹ See also Gregg 2000.

than those in the more urban (and more literary) centers (Gregg and Urman 1996, 289).

In their book, Gregg and Urman maintain that the Golan epigraphic material imposed a revision of the customary "images of how Jews and Christians lived out their 'group definition' in geographical and social terms" (Gregg and Urman 1996, 289).

Gregg and Urman's enquiry is based on forty four sites "in the early centuries of the common era" (Gregg and Urman 1996, 290). Of these, nineteen sites

yield evidence of religiously mixed population (various combinations of two or three of the groups, Jews, pagans and Christians). On the other hand present data could support suggestions of exclusivity or avoidance at a number of sites; 17 of the 44 reserve traces of a single group (Gregg and Urman 1996, 299).

Gregg and Urman think that this second point is weaker than the former, based as it is on negative evidence. They are in any case convinced that their enquiry permits to "sketch the continuing presence of Jews in the Golan during the period leading up to the time of the Arab Conquest" (Gregg and Urman 1996, 291). It is therefore an area of particular interest for studying the coexistence of Christians, pagans, and Jews (in a context where the Jewish presence was far stronger, if not dominant).

The inscriptions found in the Golan area show that in the villages—where Z.U. Maoz (1981) believed only Jews resided—there lived in reality also pagans and Christians, while Jews lived in villages that Maoz claimed were populated by Christians alone. The data that emerge speak

against hostile or stand-offish relationships enforced by any boundaries, since Jews, pagans, and Christians clearly live throughout the region, and often in the same places. As our information thickens, it becomes more difficult to discern a settlement that is explicable in terms of religious or ethnic identity (Gregg and Urman 1996, 299).

In particular, we wish to emphasize a highly significant element, which was analyzed by Gregg and Urman. The great majority of funerary inscriptions

are inscribed with the same epitaph formula, the farewell exhortation *tharsei* ("have courage!", "don't be afraid!"), sometimes with the added consolatory word, *oudeis athanatos*, *none is immortal*. [...] The object of

this formula [...] is to exhort the deceased to face with courage the dangers of their passage into their next world.¹⁰

The wide use of the same funerary *consolatio* [...] seems more indicative of a *koinê* expression, which the inhabitants of the region, regardless of religious affiliation, shared (Gregg and Urman 1996, 301).

Most of the tombstones in our collection do not have religious symbols carved on them (the Christians were most likely to do so), but there are clear examples of Jewish (inscription 176) and Christian (inscriptions 30, 185, 224) employment of the *tharsei* formula. [...] We may suppose that some of the epitaphs without symbols, but employing this formulaic admonition, were pagan burials (as in the unambiguous case of inscription 36 in Fîq) (Gregg and Urman 1996, 300).

Essentially, the study of Gregg and Urman seems to demonstrate that in the Golan Heights, there were not separate spaces for each group, and that the dead were buried next to each other, regardless of their religious affiliation. A second fact also emerges: the epitaphs employ the same expressive formulas, ignoring religious distinctions.

The formula “have courage, no one is immortal” (*tharsei* [or *tharei*, *thari*] *oudeis athanatos*) is found elsewhere on Jewish graves, at Bet Shearim and Rome.¹¹ According to Noy, the formula is found in Rome only in the catacomb of Monteverde (Noy 1995, 441). It is impossible to say whether its presence in Rome depends on the geographical origin of the dead, on a cultural evolution of funerary formulas, or simply on changing trends among the workshops where the tombstones were engraved.

Marcel Simon points out that the formula that was employed by both pagans and Christians also in Egypt, is also encountered in the variant: “don’t be sad no one is immortal in this life / in the world” (*mê typês: oudeis athanatos en tô biô toutô / en tô kosmô*) (Simon 1981, 69). Basically, the same funerary formula was widely used by Jews, Christians and pagans for centuries. It is found both in burial sites seemingly reserved for one group alone (or at least where there was a strong concentration of burials of a single group), as well in sites where tombs belonging to different religious groups were located side by side.

2.3 *Evolution of Distinctive Spaces*

We have so far examined osmosis and distinction among Christians and Jews in burial sites in Rome and the Golan Heights. Let us now turn briefly our attention to the spaces occupied by the living.

10 B. Lifshitz quoted by Gregg and Urman 1996, 300.

11 See Noy 1995, vol. 2, inscriptions nr. 99, 187, 557, 172, 31, 586.

In defining a social group and its relationship with others cohabiting the same area, it is essential to analyze their strategies in finding and occupying spaces for their houses and their group meetings. The studies of L.M. White on the origins of Christian architecture show, as it is known, that the evolution of the buildings used by the followers of Jesus are a clear symptom of the different grades and phases of their distinctive integration in the surrounding society. Only in a first time Jesus' followers are undifferentiated from the Jews, from this point of view. According to the well-known synthesis of L.M. White (I, 1996, 102–148), in the early phase, the meetings of the Jesus' followers took place in so-called house churches. In a second phase, they made use of a building that can be defined as *Domus Ecclesiae*. The *Domus ecclesiae* was not externally identifiable as a Christian site, “yet the building was clearly known as the church edifice to the local authorities” (White I, 1996, 122). This is known, for example, from an Egyptian papyrus¹² that contains street-by-street lists of buildings. The third phase was characterized by the *Aula Ecclesiae*, “larger, more regular hall[s] of assembly”, made necessary by the increasing numbers of members of a Christian group. By the end of the third century, some church buildings had become more prominent public edifices, as is clear from Porphyry's declaration (*Adversus Christianos*, Fragm. 76). The Christians “erected great buildings” of their own “imitating the construction of temples” (White I, 1996, 129).

The Constantinian innovation of basilical architecture, therefore, seems less abrupt. Although it surely represents a radically new imposition of scale and style on the architecture and aesthetic, it still depended on some continuity with earlier church buildings (White I, 1996, 139).

The three phases of development of Christian architecture clearly correspond to different grades of integration into society. The fact that Jesus' followers used private houses for their gatherings may mean that they were, as we said earlier, sub-groups of larger social aggregates, either Jewish or pagan. At the beginning, their aim was not to establish their territorial and juridical position within the cities and the empire, nor was their purpose to gain legitimacy as an independent and autonomous part of their society. For this reason, in this early phase it is difficult to distinguish Jesus' followers from Jews. In the second phase, they use different buildings and spaces for diverse functions (for example, the performance of baptism). It was not until the third phase and then in the Constantinian period, that a need for legitimacy became manifest. Afterwards came the desire to exert a hegemonic influence on society.

12 P.Oxy. I, 43 (White II, 164–166).

The data analyzed by White allow the identification of a parallel evolution both in Christian and Jewish architecture: in both cases a previous use of private houses was successively substituted by the construction of monumental buildings.

A common thread for the diffusion of Jewish groups in the Diaspora, as with other foreign religious associations, was to move first into private quarters which over time were gradually adapted more to the peculiar needs of religious use in accordance with the social circumstances of the community (White I, 1996, 101).

According to White, out of six Diaspora Synagogues extensively excavated (up to 1990), five “were renovated from private domestic edifices, and in each case they had been houses typical of domestic architecture” (White I, 1996, 62).

The fact that the same evolution involves different foreign religious groups in the towns, suggests not only the existence of a circular influence among them but also a structural relation between foreign groups and the cities. This structural aspect may be elucidated by paying attention to the non-chronological coincidence of the different phases of evolution of Jewish and Christian architecture. In fact, synagogues became buildings that were clearly recognizable externally and assumed monumental characteristics long before Christian buildings.

The developments of Jewish and Christian architecture, and their temporal displacement, are crucial for understanding the relationship between Jews and Christians. In the early phase, the relationships between groups of followers and groups of Jews were very close. Jesus’ people performed their own religious practices in private houses while also participating in synagogue activities. In this early phase of “Christian” architecture, the Jews already possessed synagogues that were clearly recognizable as such. In Corinth, for example, Jesus’ followers gathered in private houses, but also attended a synagogue that had existed for some time. In this phase, as we have noted, the Jews were undergoing a more advanced phase of evolution of religious architecture than the followers of Jesus, with marked and public signs of identity. When buildings used by Jesus’ followers became more public and better identified, the distinction grew stronger. As Christian buildings gradually transformed into the center of all religious and social functions of Jesus’ followers, the separation between Christians and Jews was effective at many levels.

The change in the use of buildings from house-church to house of the Church (*Domus ecclesiae*) must be considered in the light of another institutional development: the beginning of the monarchic episcopate. “De la fin

du II^e siècle [...] l'apparition de l'épiscopat monarchique et la professionalisation du clergé qui l'accompagne"¹³ also involved a greater distinction of Jesus' followers from Jews. It is hardly by chance that Ignatius, the first exponent of the monarchic episcopate, made the first attempt to differentiate a religious practice defined as "judaizing" (*ioudaizein*) from another that he defined "christianizing" (*christianismos*) (Pesce 2005, 42–49; Mason 2009, 460–480). However, such elements of change are not to be interpreted in terms of radical and absolute turning points. House-churches continued to exist, and Jesus' followers continued to attend them, as demonstrated in § 47 of Justin's *Dialogue with Tryphon* (Pesce 2011a, 202–205).

One cultural change that runs parallel to these mutations in Christian architecture occurred in the ethnic composition of the groups of Jesus' followers. The change took place during the second century in numerous geographical areas and passed through different phases. The groups of Jesus' followers early constituted by Jews became at a certain moment groups constituted by non-Jews. These non-Jewish Jesus' followers regarded the Jewish believers in Jesus as extraneous and outside of their group (Pesce 2011a, 199–208).

2.4 *Some Final Considerations*

Daniel Boyarin (2001, 2004, 2006a) and other scholars, for example the contributors to the volume *The Ways That Never Parted* (Becker and Reed 2003), have emphasized the fact that the boundaries between Jews and Christians have often been artificially erected by theologians (heresiologists), and by both ecclesiastic and rabbinic authorities, in an attempt to separate persons who, in reality, were not separate. We have begun from the assumption that this analysis, with which we agree, requires integration. The analysis of theological conceptions and communitarian prescriptions do not permit the access to the concrete practice of life. For a better access to the social relations among Jews and Christians, to their social arrangements and to the real conditions of people we need a different kind of evidence. First of all we have to look at non-literary sources, to documentary papyri, to epigraphic and archaeological materials.

In our analysis, we have examined an epigraphic material that illustrates concrete cohabitation and its modalities (with or without shared aims). Substantially, we selected two dishomogeneous examples. We have chosen two distant areas: one central (Rome) and one peripheral (the Golan Heights), and their places of aggregation in burial sites.

13 Rebillard, 2003, 63. See also Carletti 2008, 27–30.

At this point, we can take a further step in the elaboration of our model. Within a territorial structure, for example a city, some religious groups are independent and autonomous. Others, on the contrary, are merely sub-groups of a bigger one: they are encapsulated in organized groups that contain them. Sub-groups may employ the tools and modes of expression of the majority group to which they belong. However, they may maintain, at least partially, their own specific characteristics. Their main feature is that they participate in the life of society thanks to the *mediation* of the major group they belong to and not thanks to their differentiation or distance from such group.

Our hypothesis is that until around the end of the second century, Jesus' followers were sub-groups of Jewish ones, albeit in possession of some distinctive traits. In other words, they were not really separate groups. During the first two centuries there existed, inevitably, profound bonds between Jesus' followers and Jews, but also boundaries. From the end of the second century onwards, boundaries and physical separation increased. This seems the time when the groups of Jesus' followers are no longer sub-groups of Jewish groups.

Such process of progressive distinction coincides (a) with the building of places of worship that are identifiable as Christian. It is equally marked (b) by the emergence of funerary epigraphy that shows Christian traits (preserving, however, strong affinities with Jewish and pagan funerary formulas) and (c) by the creation of some distinct burial sites, while common burial sites of Christians, Jews and pagans still prevail. Other symptoms of evolution that deserve attention are (d) the development of monarchic episcopates in some cities, and (e) the ethnic change of the groups. Such conditions in the early centuries represent pivotal phases in the progressive formation of Christianity as a distinct reality. The boundaries became stronger in the second half of the fourth century.

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